

Okay everyone, this is my first attempt at a Harry Potter fanfic, and my first attempt at a rewrite and character insert in general. This will be the first installment in a series of "The Guardian of Azkaban" stories paralleling the novels from Prisoner of Azkaban on. Go easy on me! And naturally, I don't own Harry Potter.

"Speaking."

"Speaking in Azkabaaner."

That said, I proudly present to you...

The Guardian of Azkaban

Book 1: Rise of the Guardian

Chapter 1 – Enter the Guardian

Cornelius Fudge sat nervously behind his desk at the ministry. The night's events were far too much, even for him. First Sirius Black escaping from Azkaban, a supposedly impossible feat, then the trip to the prison itself to meet with the commander of the prison guards, the appropriately named dementor Admiral Judas Grim. Now, he would have to do the near impossible, convince Albus Dumbledore to allow a division of dementors to protect both Harry Potter and the school from Black.

His nervousness was not abated by the two sitting at the other side of his desk. The aforementioned admiral and one of his captains sat hovering over the armchairs near the minister's desk. They had conjured a steaming pot of some strange tea that smelled thickly of mint and were presently talking over their mugs in Azkabaaner, the harsh whispered language that dementors used.

It had been hard enough with his limited understanding of Azkabaaner on Azkaban, but the real surprise had come when it was revealed that the captain could speak English, albeit heavily accented.

He was drawn from his thoughts by the grating whisper of the captain. "Would you like some tea, minister?"

Fudge pulled his coat around him tighter, attempting to block out the cold that the dementors brought with them. He looked from the captain, to the steaming kettle, and then back. Dementors were not known for their hospitality. In fact, dementors weren't known for anything other than their horrible powers. He made his choice, figuring it unwise to say no to them. "Yes, thank you. What kind is it?"

The captain inclined his head and conjured another mug. "It is Azkaban green mint tea. Green mint is one of the few plants that grow on the island. Cream and sugar?"

Fudge nodded. "Please."

The tea was almost too strong, but the mint flavor warmed the minister up almost to the point where he felt that he could get rid of his coat. He was only a few sips into his cup before the door opened to admit Albus Dumbledore into the room. The two dementors rose at his entrance and inclined their heads to the headmaster.

The captain spoke quietly to his superior in Azkabaaner. "*Admiral, the proper mortal greeting is to shake hands.*"

Admiral Grim turned to his subordinate and nodded. As Dumbledore approached him, he carefully extended his hand and spoke. The captain translated. "Good evening, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. This is Admiral Judas of the house of Grim and I am Captain Esdras of the house of Demnin."

The steely eyes of the most powerful wizard alive cut into the hood of the dementor admiral. With no hesitation and no fear, he extended his hand, gripping the skeletal grey appendage of the dementor before him. He returned their greeting in Azkabaaner. "*Good evening, admiral, captain.*"

The dementors bowed in respect and returned towards their seats. Fudge now had his turn to greet the headmaster and likewise extended his hand. "Albus, it's good to see you given the circumstances. Conjure up a chair. We have much to talk about."

Dumbledore withdrew his wand and produced a large cushiony lounge chair, politely accepting a mug of the dementor's tea. "I suspect that this is about precautions to be taken at Hogwarts. I cannot control what you do in Hogsmeade and the surrounding countryside, but I refuse to allow dementors onto the grounds."

Fudge sighed, having expected this. "Be reasonable, Albus. The closer the guards are to the students, the more protection they'll have."

Dumbledore shook his head. "The wards surrounding the school are strong enough. The last things we need are dementors wandering the halls and terrorizing the students."

At this, the admiral shifted slightly over his chair, speaking slowly. *"We believe your fears to be unreasonable. We are prepared to offer Captain Demnin, our operative who is most experienced with mortals."*

Dumbledore looked to the admiral and shook his head. *"I do not care. No matter how skilled the captain is, he will still instill fear in the students if he is on the grounds."*

At this, Captain Demnin rose. He spoke quietly, in carefully pronounced, unaccented English. "But what if the operative were placed on the inside? What if he were allowed to blend in, like a student?"

Dumbledore looked to the captain. "Impossible. That could never..." His voice slowed. Before him, the dementor captain began to shrink. His towering nine foot form lowered to about six feet and began to fill out. A clicking sound was heard as shod feet hit the ground.

The dementor lowered his hood, and the headmaster gasped. Looking back at him from beneath a mop of dusty blonde hair was a pair of bright, glowing green eyes. The captain smiled with a human mouth. "Are you so sure, Albus Dumbledore? And please, call me Esdras."

The bearded wizard rocketed out of his chair. "How is this possible? What are you?"

The admiral rose and answered, floating around his subordinate to take in the illusion. *"Captain Demnin has been working on this animagus form for nearly a century. It is almost perfect. The glowing of his eyes is a result of using his dementor vision to supplement his human eyes."*

Fudge rose up in awe. This sort of thing was supposed to be impossible. Dementors were terrors, horrible creatures that lived to consume the souls of the living. And they certainly shouldn't be using magic. "Ministry regulations state that only humans can use magic. This is illegal!"

Captain Demnin turned towards the minister, the hollow edge of his dementor voice encroaching into his speech. "Who, pray tell, is going to arrest us?"

Fudge sat down very quickly.

Dumbledore shook his head. "No, this still will not work. The cold and darkness will give you away, regardless."

At that, Admiral Grim conjured a satchel from midair and withdrew two simple, black cloaks. He handed one off to Captain Demnin and kept one for himself. When both were secured around the dementors, they floated a few steps back. The shadows lightened and the cold quickly dissipated.

The captain turned to face the bearded wizard. "Most of our technology is based on cloaks. This is the mark twelve inhibitor cloak. It localizes our powers to a five foot radius. We expect to have decreased the protection radius to the cloak itself within the next few weeks. Now that we have designed the basic spells, we can make them more powerful. We even hope to integrate the spell into regular mortal clothing, making a cloak a mere accessory."

Dumbledore was still unconvinced. "What about the pervasive feeling of depression that you leave? And why don't I feel that now?"

Esdras again smiled. "When a dementor is underfed, he will automatically start to passively feed. In this state, he cannot control his feed reflex and takes in whatever food he can from his

surroundings. This is why most encounters with dementors have included feelings of depression. However, when a dementor is well fed, passive feeding can be controlled and he will only actively feed, where he is able to decide when, where, and what he eats.”

The admiral nodded. “*We ate before we got here. It’s best if you don’t ask about that.*”

Albus returned to his chair and bridged his fingers in front of his nose. He sat quietly for a few long minutes before turning to the minister. “How did we not know about this?”

Returning to his seat, and sitting in it this time, the captain looked sharply towards the minister. “The nature of the dementor has been perverted over the last few centuries by a rather well planned smear campaign. But, this is hardly the time or the place to discuss our grievances with the ministry.”

Dumbledore nodded and considered the dementor turned mortal before him. “If you wish to guard Hogwarts you will have to act as a student. That involves taking classes. You appear to be about fourteen. That would make you a fourth year.”

The dementor nodded quickly. “Yes, sir. I am ready for this eventuality. I believe I should be especially adept at History of Magic, I’ve witnessed the last three hundred some years of it.”

Albus Dumbledore sighed before extending his hand to the dementor turned human. “Very well then, Esdras. You will receive your letter by owl before the start of the term.”

Admiral Grim turned to face his subordinate, who snapped to attention and returned to his natural form. “*Captain Esdras Demnin, you will receive official orders within the next twenty four hours.*”

The dementor soldier saluted. “*Sir.*”

Minister Fudge rose from behind his desk and looked at the clock. The hand was pushing dangerously close to ‘Far Too Late’. “Well, I think we’ve come a long way in a short time. I’m certain that we can

all work out the details tomorrow, can't we? Good. If you all will excuse me, I still have to meet with the muggle Minister."

With nods, the two dementors and one wizard left the minister's office and quickly moved towards the waiting night.

Chapter 2 – Ride of the Guardian

Captain Esdras Demnin stepped out into the crushing mass of people at the King's Cross Station. In his mortal form, dressed in jeans and a t-shirt he had the unexpected pleasure of being visible to muggles as well as magical people. He had relied only on his animagus form eyes to reduce muggle suspicion until he had stopped at a shop near the train station to buy something that muggles called sunglasses. He now had the dark lenses covering his glowing eyes and slowly wound his way through the crowd, coming finally to the brick wall entrance to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. With a few quick steps he and his footlocker were through.

Quickly withdrawing his cloak, he wrapped it around his shoulders and kept a wide distance between him and other students and their families. He paused for a few moments to watch the way the mortals interacted together in their own family units. A few times people would come rushing past him and he could see them visibly shiver in the bubble of cold that surrounded him. Esdras slowly made his way into the train and found the special compartment that had been marked as reserved and put away his trunk and put the sunglasses back in their carrying case.

Before sitting down, he pulled out his well worn orders from his back pocket and uttered the spell that would reveal the writing. The parchment bore the seal of Azkaban Guard Command and a bright blue 'Top Secret' stamp. The whole form was written in Azkabaaner:

From: Admiral Judas Grim, Commander, Azkaban Guard Command

To: Captain Esdras Demnin, C.O. Thirteenth Dementor Infantry

You are hereby requested and required to report to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft And Wizardry and assume command of operations for the Hogsmeade region in the ongoing search for the escaped inmate chi psi three nine zero, prisoner Sirius Black. Your command will include the seventh, ninth, and twelfth Dementor Marines. While engaged in this capacity, you will also maintain protective surveillance on Harry Potter. You are to assume mortal guise while in public during said surveillance. You are ordered to contact Professor Remus Lupin to discuss feeding arrangements for the soldiers under

your command. You will brief headquarters at the minimum of once weekly with status reports. Further commands will be issued as warranted.

J.G.

Esdras sighed. He was not pleased. Most of the bad publicity that dementors had received over the last few centuries was the result of the dementor marine divisions. They were notoriously hard to command, and prone to lashing out if reigned in too tightly. Yet he would have to rely on them for the moment, and for the inspection of the train to occur before they arrived at Hogsmeade. The best choice would be to spread them to the outer reaches of his command and attempt to obtain his own infantry division to guard the areas close to the town and school.

Withdrawing a map of the area from his trunk, he sat down and began working on troop deployments. He had made very little progress before the door to his cabin opened. A dark blond and decidedly female head poked through the door. "Excuse me, all the space is taken up. Mind if we join you?"

Esdras looked up in shock and rose quickly from his seat. "Umm...I really wasn't supposed to have company. However, if there is nowhere else I do not believe it would do any harm. I am Esdras Demnin."

The blond girl smiled and stepped inside. "I'm Katie Bell; this is Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet. I'm fourth year Gryffindor, they're fifth." She shivered quietly as she put her trunk above her seat. "Cold enough in here for you?"

Esdras nodded and pulled out his wand and conjured three fleece blankets with embedded warming charms. "I am sorry, please take these blankets. I do not believe it will be getting any warmer in here."

The three girls seemed to take this for what it was worth and soon were in awe over the exceptional warmth and softness of the blankets. Katie immediately took notice of something the other girls did not. "Your eyes are glowing."

Esdras blinked, he had forgotten about the only outward sign of his difference. "Oh, yeah. It's a family thing. We can see a little better than most people." He fumbled around a bit and pulled the sunglasses back out. "I have these I can put on if it disturbs you."

Katie silently regarded him and his eyes for a moment. "No, that's alright. What house did you say you were in again?"

Esdras folded his hands in his lap and looked nervously about. "I am a transfer student, a fourth year. I have yet to be assigned a house. I believe that will happen when we arrive?"

Katie smiled and nodded at this. "Well, you seem alright. I hope you get Gryffindor, then."

Esdras smiled at the girl and returned to his work, ending the discussion. The three girls began a discussion about quidditch. The captain tried his best to remember his duty, but his love of the sport finally won out. In the end he surrendered his map and quill to join in their discussion.

The weather had proceeded to get steadily worse as the Hogwarts Express made its way towards Hogsmeade. Inside the reserved cabin, Esdras was the only one still awake. As it was, he noticed the train slowing down. Looking through the window with his dementor vision, he could see the source of the disruption. Flanking the train was a division of dementors.

The train ground to a halt, throwing Esdras and Angelina forward. Esdras rose quickly and helped the girl back into her seat. He moved towards the cabin door and opened it just as the lights began to flicker. Turning back to the girls he caught them with a gaze that bore no disobedience. "Remain in here with the door locked. Do not open it if you value your life. I will return shortly."

He closed and locked the door before they could object. Once the door was closed he loosened his controls and took to his dementor form, floating quickly down the corridor towards the back of the train. He reached the back car just in time to see one of the dementors forced back into the corridor by a patronus.

Drawing himself up to as high as possible inside the car, he took notice of the dementor's rank and called out. "*Stand down, Lieutenant.*"

The dementor turned to face him and snapped to attention, immediately floating to him. "*Lieutenant Miles Chattel of the seventh marines, sir.*"

Esdras was not pleased. He floated right up to the young marine and stood hood to hood with him. "*Exactly what part of your orders were you fulfilling by invading one of the cabins? The orders I forwarded to your commander were for you to sweep the aisles and search the cabins visually through the windows. The entire purpose of this...*"

The sound of a door opening in the corridor disrupted Esdras' rant. The cause of the door opening was a graying mortal dressed in shabby robes. He had his wand raised towards the two dementors. Esdras backed away from his subordinate. "*Exit the train and search from the outside. Do not reenter the train.*" A salute and a rustling of cloaks indicated his order was fulfilled. The dementor turned to face the mortal. "You are professor Remus Lupin?"

The professor nodded. "I am. Are you Captain Demnin?"

The dementor nodded and withdrew a parchment from his cloak. "I am. I am to discuss the energy requirements of my troops with you."

Lupin shook his head. "Another time, but I have to discuss this with you now. Harry seems especially vulnerable to dementors. Proximity to your friend there caused him to pass out."

Esdras cocked his head to the side in confusion. "There is no record of that ever happening with such a light incidence of contact. Please keep me informed. And as for him, Azkaban marines are more trouble than they are worth in my opinion. They will maintain their distance, I will see to it."

Lupin nodded and sighed. "We will discuss energy requirements at a more suitable time."

The dementor snapped to attention. "Yes, professor. Please take these bars of chocolate. I believe you will need them." He withdrew a grey, withered hand from his cloak, holding half a dozen bars of chocolate.

The professor only smiled and patted his own cloak. "I already have plenty."

Opening the rear door of the train, Esdras stepped out into the rain, watching it turn to ice around him. He floated out towards the front of the train. It seemed that the visual inspection of the train was nearly finished. The commander of the division was hovering over the engine. Upon noticing his superior approaching, he snapped to attention and saluted. *"Captain Demnin, the inspection is almost complete. Are you sure you do not want to have us visually inspect the passengers at closer range?"*

The rim of Esdras' hood lowered, a sign of dementor anger. He faced the commander and glared into his hood. *"Are you questioning my orders, Captain Sanguis?"*

The commander startled and shook his head. *"No, sir. Not at all, sir."*

The captain turned to face the division, which had assembled above the first car. *"You will flank the train at a distance of fifty feet until we reach Hogsmeade. At that point you will rise to an altitude of one hundred feet and maintain visual surveillance over the unloading procedure. Split into two units and continue surveillance on both the first years by boats and the remainder by carriage. Under no circumstance are you to enter the school grounds. This will be cause for immediate punishment, reduction in rank, and reassignment of the entire division. If any one of you fails, you all will bear the burden of that failure."*

He continued to make hood contact with his subordinates for a few seconds before dismissing them. As the train below began to move, Esdras floated back to the door and entered. He paused to take mortal form before walking down the hall towards his cabin. Through the doors, he could hear the beginnings of fearful discussions about what had just happened.

Esdras unlocked the door of the cabin and entered, smiling nonchalantly at the girls inside. Katie rose and drew her wand. "Esdras! How the devil did you get all wet?" She cast a drying charm over him. "And why on earth did you leave when there were dementors about. They could have killed you!"

He simply smiled at her and shrugged, returning to his seat. "I don't think dementors are all that bad, just a little misunderstood. Does anyone need chocolate?" Esdras produced the chocolate bars he had hidden under his cloak again.

The three girls looked at him as if he had grown a second head but each accepted a chocolate bar. They sat in silence for a moment before Angelina spoke up. "Is it true that dementors have no eyes?"

Esdras waited to see if anyone else would respond. When there was only silence, he nodded. "No eyes, no nose, and no ears. But they can still hear."

Angelina shivered. "How do you know?"

Esdras felt sorry to have to lie to these nice girls. "Well, I learned about them from my father. He used to work with them, you see."

Katie stared at him with a shocked look on her face. "Your father was an auror on Azkaban?"

Esdras looked down at his chocolate bar. "He worked on Azkaban, yes. It's not something you really talk about."

He smiled politely and the others nodded. They spent the rest of their time in quiet discussion about the growing danger outside the school gates.

Chapter 3 – The Transfer Student

Captain Esdras Demnin, late of Azkaban, towered over the tiny, quivering first years in the center of the Great Hall of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry listening to the list of names being called off. He was the only one still in his cloak, and he had his hood up. This combination, as well as the bubble of cold air around him, seemed to be adding to the growing sense of fear in the rapidly shrinking body of students.

The last name of the first year additions was called, and then Professor McGonagall cleared her throat again. "We also have a special student transferring to our school, a fourth year. Esdras Demnin."

Esdras nodded and walked up to the stool, turned, and sat down. As the professor approached, he could see the tension in her eyes. This was to be expected. He tried to offer her a polite smile before she slipped his hood down and placed the Sorting Hat onto his head.

It was a moment before he heard a voice, speaking to him in Azkabaaner. *"Well, this is certainly unusual, a wolf in the fold. Albus made mention that I would have to sort a dementor. But where should I put you? There is a great secret that lurks in your soul, dementor. And try as you might, you are still a dark creature. Perhaps Slytherin would be best for you."*

Esdras mentally recoiled in horror. *"No, I have met too many a wizard from that house and I know what they are like."* He brought to his mind pictures of the aftermath of the first war, and the cells filled with Death Eaters. He could hear the hat agreeing with him. After a moment of silence he offered a thought to the hat. *"That nice girl said she hoped I got into Gryffindor. That would also keep me close to Potter for my surveillance."*

The hat considered this for a moment, but ultimately rejected it. *"No, it is your clarity of thought that interests me, the centuries of knowledge you have gained. Yes, it is not what you are, but what you will bring that will determine where you are placed. I know where you belong."* The hat shouted the decision. "Ravenclaw."

Esdras Demnin, currently of Ravenclaw house, removed the hat and rose from the stool and proceeded down the long table to an empty seat. It took him a moment to realize that the members of his house were clapping for him. He smiled brightly. When he sat down, he looked around and managed to catch the eye of Katie Bell at the Gryffindor table. He offered her an apologetic grin which she returned with a wink.

Dumbledore rose and spoke a few words to the school. "Welcome, welcome all to another year at Hogwarts. We are starting this year in dangerous times, but I would like to remind you that you are the safest you can possibly be here in the school. A word on security. Dementors have been assigned from Azkaban to guard the school gates and surrounding areas. They will be checking everyone who enters and leaves the school grounds. Under no circumstances should you give them any reason to approach you. Dementors are powerful creatures and are able to see through charms and spells, even through invisibility cloaks. If any of you have further questions, we have a bit of an expert on the subject with us, our transfer student, Mr. Esdras Demnin. If you all are as hungry as I am, I suggest we begin this feast immediately."

With those words, plates of food instantly appeared on the tables. Esdras eyed a shepherd's pie and loaded his plate. Within minutes he had consumed the entire pie and started on a nearby roast. He was interrupted on this assault by a debate from across the table. "But it doesn't matter, we still need another beater or we're lost. Is it cold in here?"

Esdras perked and directed his voice towards the rather pretty girl across from him. "Excuse me, I'm a beater."

The girl turned her head and eyed him inquisitively. "Are you any good?"

The dementor smiled. "You have no idea." He extended a hand across the table. "Esdras Demnin."

The girl nodded and shook his hand. "Cho Chang, I'm trying out for seeker. Come out for practice next weekend, we'll have to see if you're as good as you say."

Esdras nodded and returned to the roast; still going strong after all the others had long since stopped. He was starting to attract attention since no one knew where he was putting it all. The only thing that stopped him was a magical note floating towards him and landing by his plate.

Esdras wiped his mouth and opened the note, written with a tall, looping cursive. "Mr. Demnin, please meet with me and Professor Lupin immediately after dinner. Professor McGonagall will escort you. Albus Dumbledore."

The dementor leaned back and looked down the aisle towards the dais containing the professor's table. He nodded when he had the headmaster's attention and returned to the table, which had now been set for dessert. Within minutes, a chocolate cake was no more.

Professor Minerva McGonagall escorted the animagus dementor through the darkened halls of the school. He was currently floating, *floating*, in mortal form beside her. She shivered.

Esdras picked this up and brought his hands together in front of him, the cuffs of his robes and cloaks hiding them from view. "You fear my kind, don't you?"

The professor had never been addressed so bluntly by a student before. Whether this was a sign of him lacking social understanding or the lack of fear demonstrated by an immortal remained to be seen. "Yes. There are more than enough reasons to fear your kind."

The dementor sighed and released his form, growing an extra three feet and continuing to float down the hall. "We are a misunderstood people. We have been for over four millennia. I hope to begin to destroy some of those misunderstanding. It will not be easy."

Another thing was bothering the professor. "How were you able to eat so much? Not even Hagrid eats that much."

Esdras laughed softly. "We are able to extract energy from mortal food, but it's not enough. Dementors expend so much energy that I would have to eat as much as all of Ravenclaw house put together at

every meal to even be able to lift my head. This is why we must rely on souls or patroni."

McGonagall nodded slowly, and pressed her lips together in a fine line as they neared a gargoyle. She stopped in front of it and spoke the password. "Lemon drop." The gargoyle jumped to the side and allowed the two to ascend the spiraling staircase. Reaching the top of the staircase, they immediately entered through the door into the headmaster's office.

Dumbledore was seated behind the desk, and Remus Lupin had taken one of the chairs in front of it. Esdras floated in front of the desk and snapped to attention. "You wished to see me, sir."

The headmaster nodded. "Please take a seat. I believe you already know Professor Lupin?" The dementor sat and nodded to the professor before Dumbledore continued. "I believe we should all meet to keep ourselves informed of recent events throughout the year. Perhaps once a week would suffice?"

The dementor nodded. "That is agreeable. So long as next week's meeting does not interfere with Quidditch try outs."

McGonagall arched an eyebrow. "This is unacceptable. We can't have a dementor flying around playing Quidditch. Besides, what happens when you have to play against Gryffindor, against Potter?"

Esdras shrugged. "I believe an updated cloak will be available by then, but if not I can always feign an illness."

Ignoring the confusion on McGonagall's face, Dumbledore stepped in. "He is a student here at Hogwarts and like any other he has the right to try out for his house Quidditch team. But you will be walking a very thin line, balancing Quidditch, military command, and schoolwork, Mr. Demnin."

The dementor bowed in agreement and turned to face Professor Lupin. "Professor, I have some preliminary numbers. There are currently forty two dementors stationed under this command. I believe they can survive on a weekly ration of ten soul equivalents. That would allow seven dementors a day to feed, six days out of the week.

I will feed separately on the seventh day in order to keep myself from passive feeding.”

Lupin looked confused. “You’ll need ten souls every week?”

Esdras sighed and looked around. “How to explain this... Each mortal has a soul; each soul has a constant energy value to it. No one soul is stronger than any other. But a Patronus is different. It can be stronger or weaker than a soul depending on the strength behind it. It draws us to it to feed and then repels us forcefully when we are full. You need only find a Patronus or Patroni that fulfills the daily requirement.” From within his cloak, he produced a small black box. “This meter will give you an equivalent value for a cast Patronus.”

The graying man took the box. “Very well, set up a feeding schedule and I’ll have the energy for them.”

The dementor nodded. “These are better rations than they usually get on the island, but my men will still be in passive feeding mode. There is nothing I can do about that. Ten soul equivalents may be hard enough to find as it is. Azkaban is prepared to offer you one hundred Galleons a month for your services, Professor.”

Lupin’s eyes grew wide. “One hundred...a month? For this? I couldn’t possibly.”

Esdras simply laughed. “Do not worry, Professor. The Guard Command is very good to its allies. By providing this service, you are helping us in the most important way imaginable. Such payment is only fair.”

The headmaster sighed and stood, all others in the room following suit. “I believe we’ve done enough for the night. I suggest that we all get some rest. Mr. Demnin, you’ll have your first classes tomorrow.”

Esdras nodded with a smile on his face. “Yes, sir. I’m actually looking forward to it.” He bowed to the three professors and walked towards the door. “Good night, sirs, ma’am.”

It was Lupin that called out to stop him. “Hold on, I’ll walk with you. If Filch catches you out this late, he’ll give you detention.”

The dementor changed forms, now a nine foot terror hovering before them. He turned his cloaked head towards the professors. His voice was playful through the hollowness. "Not if he can't see me." He floated to the door, but paused before he touched the handle and turned back to face the professors. "However, I have no idea where I'm going."

Chapter 4 – The Only Fear

It had been decided that Esdras would be best served with his own room in the Ravenclaw dorms. And while not needing as much sleep as a mortal, Esdras found it to be an interesting experience, especially with the luxury of such a soft bed. Waking up and stretching, the Dementor proceeded towards the showers and quickly prepared himself for the day.

Securing his cloak around him, Esdras walked down the stairs. At the bottom he turned to look at them. Having never had any need for stairs before, they were a bit of an oddity for him. He was interrupted from his musings by another Ravenclaw. "You're the new fourth year, aren't you? I'm Roger Davies."

Esdras shook hands with the young man before him. "Yes, that's me. Esdras Demnin. Nice to meet you."

Roger clapped him on the back and shivered a little. "Well, let's see if we can't get you used to this place quicker than the first years. I'll give you the grand tour, but for now let's get down to breakfast."

Esdras nodded and followed him to the doorway. A feminine voice stopped him. "Wait up, you two." Turning around, he saw Cho rushing to join them.

Esdras held the door open for her and smiled as she passed by. "Good morning, Cho."

Pleasantries exchanged, the three Ravenclaws passed through the halls to the stairwell to take them down to the Great Hall. They were halted at the top of the stairwell by the absence of the staircase. Roger sighed heavily. "I get the feeling that this staircase doesn't want to be here. Most of the time it's hanging around somewhere else."

Esdras nodded and smirked. It would be a simple matter for him to simply step out and float down to the ground. But that would blow his cover. So he waited with his new friends as they told him the mass myriad secrets of the school, the young Dementor committing as many of them to memory as possible.

History of Magic sounded more exciting than it actually was for Esdras. The one perk came in that Ravenclaw and Gryffindor had this class together. Katie Bell had seen fit to take the seat next to him, offering him a stunning smile at the same time. Esdras was pleased.

At the front of the classroom, the ghostly form of Professor Binns started his lecture. "I thought that since our school has been surrounded by Dementors, I'd discuss the history of humans and Dementors. Who can tell me when relations were formalized between the two?"

The class was silent. Esdras, with a smile on his face, raised his hand. "Modern Dementor-mortal relations began with the signing of the Treaty of Edinburgh in 972."

The professor nodded. "Correct, Mr. Demnin. Ten points to Ravenclaw. The Treaty of Edinburgh provided fair treatment for Dementors in human society." Any talk of fair treatment was interrupted by a great peal of laughter from the middle of the classroom. "Do you have something to add, Mr. Demnin?"

Esdras tried to contain himself and stood. "Fair treatment? You call the Treaty of Edinburgh fair treatment? Have you ever read the thing? It regulates everything from Dementor trade to settlement locations. It even restricts breeding; families have to apply to have children. It forces us to live within strict zones, so far removed that the trade regulations aren't necessary because there's no one to trade with. It even dethroned the royal house and eliminated the Azkaban monarchy. The only reason the royal house signed the treaty was because of the great famine after the Patronus charm was created in 956. It wasn't until 1038 that Azkaban researchers had discovered a way to convert Patronus into a viable food source and by then, we were stuck in the treaty."

Professor Binns looked curiously at the student. "We?"

Esdras corrected himself quickly. "They." He took his seat again. "But never mind, continue spreading ministry lies."

Esdras remained icily silent with a glare that could kill as he listened to the revised history that the ministry had set for his people. He would have broken the desk under his grip if he hadn't felt a warm hand on his arm. Looking over to the source, he saw Katie, who had a calming look on her face. Esdras released his death grip on the desk and returned his hands to his lap, where Katie cautiously took one. He held her brown eyes with his glowing green eyes and smiled softly. They stayed like that for the rest of the class.

Walking out of class, Esdras decided it best to head out into the courtyard to cool his head before potions. He could tell that he had a shadow and addressed it directly. "Thank you for calming me down in there."

Katie stepped out from behind him and walked along side. "I don't think I've ever seen anyone get that worked up over Dementors before. And I certainly don't know anyone who has read the Treaty of Edinburgh."

Esdras laughed, passing from the building into the grassy area. "Well, Dementors are a bit of a hobby of mine."

She reached out and tugged the edge of his cloak. "Enough so that you start to dress like them?"

He tried his best to look offended. "The cloak keeps me warm, thank you very much. And besides, it looks good."

Katie smiled playfully. "It's not the cloak." Esdras turned with a question on his lips but before he could say anything she was on her way across the courtyard. "Good day, Mr. Demnin."

The Dementor decided that mortal women were very strange creatures, indeed.

Care of Magical Creatures, on the other hand, proved to be a horrifying experience for Esdras. He was perfectly happy to calmly walk outside the gates and down to the cottage where the groundskeeper made his home. He waited with the other Ravenclaws

and Hufflepuffs until the door opened and out walked Hagrid, all of twelve feet tall.

He and many other Dementors had met Hagrid the year before, and the only reason they had been able to move him to his cell was because they could float taller than he. This time was different, the Dementor was grounded. Esdras could feel the normal fearlessness that his immortality provided him slip away as the ages old fear encompassed him. Hagrid was a full three feet taller than a Dementor, and Dementors feared people taller than themselves.

Noticing a new face in the crowd, the naturally friendly Hagrid advanced and held out a hand. "Hello there, you must be the new student. You can call me Hagrid, everyone else does."

Esdras began rapidly backing away from the goliath. His English failed him. He started talking in the harsh whispers of Azkabaaner. *"You are too tall. Stay away from me."*

Looking around quickly, Esdras took note of the cottage and made a break for it. With a float assisted jump, he scaled the entire height and landed on the thatch roof. Laying down on the roof and peering down over the edge, he was now almost seventeen feet tall. He let out a sigh as Hagrid walked over and looked up at him. "Something on my roof, is there?"

From beneath the hood, two glowing green eyes blinked, still regarding him warily. After a few moments, Esdras found himself able to remember his English again. "You are too tall. That scares me." He carefully extended a hand. "I am Esdras Demnin. You have a very nice roof, Hagrid."

Hagrid shook hands carefully, then scratched his beard in confusion but finally nodded. "Thank you. Well, why don't you all give me a minute and I'll bring our lesson over here for today."

The roof itself wasn't strong enough to support the full weight of a person, so for the remainder of the class, Esdras hovered over the roof and no one was the wiser. By the end of class, Roger and Cho were both waiting for Esdras under the roof. Cho called up to him. "Are you really that afraid of taller people?"

The glowing green eyes peered down from the roof and narrowed slightly within the shadows of the hood. "Yes. I don't like to talk about it." Esdras hopped down off the roof and immediately skittered away as fast as possible, calling out over his shoulder. "Come on, let's get out of here."

The other two hurried to catch up. Roger took a moment to rearrange his robes. "You know Hagrid is probably the gentlest soul in this entire school, right?"

Esdras nodded. "Believe me, I know. And I'm going to work on this but for now..." He shivered slightly. "It's scary."

Status Report

From: Captain Esdras Demnin, Commander of Operations, Hogsmeade Region; Commanding Officer, Thirteenth Dementor Infantry

To: Admiral Judas Grim, Commander, Azkaban Guard Command

Reconnaissance continues both within and without the school grounds with no sign of the prisoner. I have dispatched the Seventh Marine Division to guard the outer gates of the school. The Ninth and Twelfth Divisions are providing a five mile perimeter around the school. Each unit also provides a two man roving team within this perimeter. I feel that this is still not enough and request the presence of the Thirteenth Infantry to take over guarding of the school gates to allow the Seventh Division to assist with perimeter surveillance.

My cover as student remains secure. Interactions within the school are proving to be easy to handle. Professor Lupin has successfully found more than sufficient energy to feed the forces on a regular basis. There is enough excess to allow for the Thirteenth Infantry, as well.

On a personal note, would you please ask Commander Reaping to send my broom, Bludgerbat, and Quidditch robes with my vulture. Please express to the charm researchers that the sooner the next

mark of inhibitor cloak is ready, the more active I can be in my reconnaissance here within the school.

Esdras

Esdras folded up his status report and walked down to the lake. Here, waiting on the rocks, was his vulture that carried his communiqués to and from the island. He held out his arm and the great bird leapt up and onto his arm. He tied the note to her leg and gave her a gentle pat on the head. *“Now, get this to Admiral Grim at headquarters quickly and you’ll get a treat.”*

He held up his arm and the great bird flew off into the growing darkness. The commander of operations for the Hogsmeade region sighed and lifted himself into the air, floating alone back towards the school.

Chapter 5 – This Mortal Thing

The day of Quidditch try outs dawned and Esdras was nervous. He had still yet to receive any form of reply from Azkaban, neither a communiqué from headquarters nor a package containing his broom. He was hesitant to use one of the school brooms. He had taken one out for a spin and found that he could fly faster and more accurately if he was without a broom, blindfolded and dizzy.

Thusly, it was with some relief that he saw the great swooping form of his vulture, an ungainly parcel weighing her down. Esdras stood and held out his arms, catching the burden while the bird circled and eventually landed on his shoulder. He laughed happily and returned to his seat.

It was Cho who spoke up first. “Esdras, that’s not an owl.”

Esdras laughed happily. “I know. This is Constance.” He paused to hand the great bird a slice of bacon. “She’s far more reliable than an owl, and she can carry heavier packages. We’ve been friends for a few years now.”

When the great bird was finished its meal, it took off out the window to take roost near the lake. Cho directed her attention to the brown paper package sitting next to her friend. “Well, what did you get?”

The Dementor opened the package. “Hopefully, it’s what I asked for.” He smiled when he tore away the last of the paper and sat each thing out on the table. “They sent me my broom, my Bludgerbat, and some of my old Quidditch robes.” A letter fell out of the package as well. “And a letter from home.”

Attention was peaked at this. “Oh? Where are you from? Any good news?”

He opened the letter, which was the well hidden communiqué he had been waiting for, and scanned the contents written in Azkabaaner. “I’m from up north a ways. And no, no good news, really.” The letter only confirmed that no further progress had been made in the search for Sirius Black, and that his request for the Thirteenth Infantry had

been denied. “Anyway, at least I have my gear, now I can give you all a good showing at try outs.”

He moved to repack his gear but found his broom in the hands of Roger, who was trying to decipher the Azkabaaner print on the side. “What kind of broom is this? I can’t make out the name.”

Gracefully, Esdras pulled it from his grip and slung it over his shoulder. “It’s a Starwind Mark Eight. It’s a local brand.”

As quickly as he had gotten the broom back, he found himself missing his Bludgerbat. Turning around, a smiling Katie Bell, flanked by two identical redheads, stood holding the bat. The redhead on the left spoke first. “Katie said we simply had to meet you, and now I can see why.”

The one on the right continued for the first. “Indeed, brother. Another beater like us. Certainly we’re in good company. I’m Fred Weasley, this is my brother George.”

The left countered. “I thought I was Fred?”

The right corrected. “That’s right, you are. Sorry about that. I’m George Weasley, this is my brother Fred.”

Esdras blinked in confusion, and then returned his attention to the center. He held out his hand. “Can I have my bat back, please?”

Katie replaced the bat in his hand, letting her hand linger on his for a moment more than necessary. They were interrupted by a cough from the left. “So what is that made out of?”

Esdras tossed the bat in the air and watched it spin. “Eastern Hemlock, it came from the same tree as my wand. It only grows in North America.” He caught it and spun it with a flourish before turning on his heel. “Wish me luck in try outs.”

Surprisingly, he heard a chorus of three give reply. He laughed to himself as he walked up the stairs to go to the Ravenclaw common room and whispered in Azkabaaner. “*I’m getting the hang of this mortal thing.*”

That night at dinner, Esdras found himself the topic of conversation at the Ravenclaw table. He tried to hide behind his hood and simply eat his meal. "Please, I don't like to talk about these things. It's bad luck."

Cho would hear nothing of this. "You're just superstitious. Anyway, after that he managed to shoot this trick shot, I still have no idea how he did it, but the Bludger knocked the broom out from under Roger and then it bounced vertically to knock the Quaffle right out of Bradley's hands. I've never seen anything like it."

Above the applause and accolades, Esdras just sat there, trying to calm everyone down. "It's not that big a deal. We have a summer league at home. I always manage to make the B team."

Roger clapped him on the back and raised a glass. "Well, no B team today. To Esdras Demnin, the newest beater for Ravenclaw." The toast was met with hearty cheers and the draining of glasses.

Cho leaned across the table and smirked at Esdras. "That's not all, either. From what I hear, our man Esdras has the ladies quite keen on him."

This statement led to no shortage of applause and backslapping. Esdras could only look confused. "What? Who?"

The Quidditch team leaned in conspiratorially. Cho began. "Well, I heard it from Marietta who heard it from Padma who heard it from Parvati who heard it from Angelina who overheard Fred and George talking about how Katie hasn't even looked at Oliver Wood once since the train ride up here."

The Dementor looked confused. "This means something?"

The other chaser, Chambers, smacked Esdras on the back of the head. "Of course it means something. Katie has been pining for Oliver since she was a first year but he's been so hell bent on Quidditch he hasn't noticed her as anything other than a chaser. She hasn't had eyes for anyone else since you came along. This is big, my friend, very big."

The solemn nods across the table only served to exacerbate the gravity of the situation for the Dementor. "Well, something will have to be done about this, then. Won't it?"

The meal ended far too soon for Esdras, who was still hungry after expending such a large amount of energy at the Quidditch try outs. He could feel his control slipping as he began to passively feed, unable to stop from drawing the happiness from those who wandered inside the area his cloak failed to protect. He walked slowly, with his mind thinking towards next Tuesday when he was scheduled to meet with Professor Lupin to properly feed. Maybe he would ask for a little bit of help tomorrow to make it until then. Enveloped in these thoughts, he nearly ran into Katie Bell in the bottleneck near the doors.

She smiled playfully. "Hey there, Quidditch star."

Esdras smirked, trying to control his feeding instinct. He was having only partial success, enough for Katie not to feel anything, at least. "Well, I did have luck on my side and an angel on my shoulder." Katie blushed and he decided that now would be as good a time as any to do something about their situation. He would try something that other mortals around him had been doing lately. If his teammates were right, the result would be rather exciting. "So, there's a Hogsmeade weekend coming up at the end of the month?"

Katie nodded furiously. "In three weeks and two days."

He nodded in reply, walking slowly through the crush of students. "I don't suppose you have plans already?"

She shook her head. "No, no plans yet."

Esdras put on his best smile and lowered his hood. "I've never been before. I have no idea where anything is. I was wondering if, maybe, we could go together."

Katie hardly waited for him to finish before she replied. "Yes, that would be perfect." She blushed furiously at this and, after a moments hesitation, took his hand before changing the subject. "Come on, I

suppose you should meet your opposition. You already know Fred and George, our beaters. I made Chaser along with Alicia and Angelina. And here's our Seeker, now. Hey, Harry!"

The Dementor looked up in horror. Turning to face him was the boy who lived, himself, flanked by the ones known as Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. Esdras tried to back away but the crowd had closed behind him, forcing the two of them closer together. Harry took another step forward, entering the five foot circle, and winced. The minute amount of passive feeding continued and within a second, he was on the ground, screaming. Esdras had a choice, continue harming the person in front of him or blow his cover.

Jumping into the air, Esdras rocketed towards the ceiling, abandoning his mortal disguise in his haste. Hovering just below the magical cloud cover, he looked down at the crowd who was looking up at him. There was pure silence for a second before the first of the screaming started.

"DEMENTOR! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!"

Esdras floated a little higher, hiding himself in the illusory night sky. From his perch he could see the chaos below as students tried to force their way out of the room. Katie was looking up at the clouds with a look of hurt and confusion. Ron and Hermione were trying their best to keep Harry from being trampled in the mob. The entire student body was stopped by a powerful, amplified voice, a voice that bid no dissent.

"SILENCE!" Albus Dumbledore commanded. "Prefects, take control of your houses and see them back to the dormitories immediately. Mister Demnin, get down here right now...in mortal form."

Esdras quickly floated across the roof, dodging the rafters until he was right above the head table. He recast his animagus spell and descended quickly, coming to rest at the headmaster's left. His hood was raised and his hands were hidden in his robes. "I am sorry, headmaster. There was no other way. I was passively feeding and did not know he was so close, I had no place to move away from him in the crowd."

The white bearded wizard cut him off with a surprisingly gentle motion of the hand. "No, this would have come about sooner or later, I suppose. But we must consider what we are to do now."

The last of the students had filed out, in record time. Esdras turned with Dumbledore and walked through a side doorway, into one of the many back corridors of the castle. "With my cover blown, there really is no reason for me to remain, sir. I am certain I will not be accepted by the student body now. I will send a dispatch to the guard command and recall myself immediately."

Dumbledore sighed and turned down another hallway. Coming to a halt near a portrait of a bowl of fruit, he tickled the pear and the painting pulled back to reveal the kitchen. "I find a mug of hot chocolate helps me to concentrate sometimes, don't you?"

Esdras could only nod as he floated in behind the headmaster. Taking a seat at a nearby prep table, the kindly wizard soon had a pot of hot chocolate and two mugs before them. Accepting his mug with a nod, Esdras looked around the kitchen. "I fear I am still hungry, sir. But my day for feeding is not until next Tuesday."

Dumbledore nodded. "Not surprising, I believe you put forth quite a show on the Quidditch pitch this afternoon. Perhaps I can help."

With another wave of his wand a brilliant silver plume came forth. The Dementor could feel his mortal disguise being ripped away by the Patronus before him as he fed. When he was finished, he backed away quickly, well aware that the silver beast would turn on him after he was satisfied. He calmed when the Patronus disappeared and he could feel his mortal shell returning. His passive feeding instinct was satiated. "Thank you, sir."

They sat in amiable silence for a few moments before the headmaster again spoke. "Do you really think it would be in your best interests to leave?"

The Dementor looked up from his mug. "Judging by the general terror that transpired just now, I think it would be for the best. I can reside at the forward operating base on the lake shore and work just as well from there."

Dumbledore nodded solemnly. "You could do that. Or, you could attempt to start changing over four millennia of false ideas."

Chapter 6 – An Unusual Lesson

Status Report

From: Captain Esdras Demnin, Commander of Operations, Hogsmeade Region; Commanding Officer, Thirteenth Dementor Infantry

To: Admiral Judas Grim, Commander, Azkaban Guard Command

Reconnaissance continues both within and without the school grounds with no sign of the prisoner. The Marine divisions report that they are hunkering down for the long haul and have set up a small camp on the edge of the forest by the lake. I again request the presence of the Thirteenth Infantry. I believe their presence for close range surveillance would aid the Marines in their perimeter patrols.

My cover has, as mortals say, been blown. I was unable to prevent passive feeding in the presence of Harry Potter, who is unusually sensitive to Dementors. Dumbledore, however, has requested that I remain enrolled and measures will be taken to insure that the students are properly briefed.

Esdras

It would be impossible to say that things got any easier for Esdras Demnin after his true nature was revealed. The one small miracle seemed to be that the Ravenclaw Quidditch team took things remarkably in stride. Dementor or not, they weren't about to lose the best beater who had tried out for the team.

Roger asked only one question on their first day of practice. "Are you so good because you're a Dementor?"

Esdras shrugged. "I suppose that's part of the reason. I am good because I've had two hundred thirty years of practice. I am also much stronger than a mortal. And flying is much more natural for me."

At the mention of how long he had been playing, they had all paled. Cho asked quietly. "Esdras, how old are you?"

The Dementor smiled. "I'll be three hundred thirteen next year."

Other than that, the crowds in the halls parted for him. Few people outside of his house talked to him. Katie Bell made herself preciously scarce.

It had been Professor Lupin's idea, with Dumbledore's approval, to teach Dementors to all levels of Defense Against the Dark Arts classes in a single session the week before the Hogsmeade weekend. So, with the headmaster's permission, for one period of the day, all classes were postponed and the entire school reported to the Great Hall, sitting at their house tables.

When everyone was settled, Professor Lupin cast his wand and a chocolate bar appeared in front of everyone's plate. "Welcome all, as you know today we'll be teaching everyone about Dementors. I had thought about saying something on the subject but anything I could say would pale in comparison to Mr. Demnin here. The chocolate helps with cases of mild exposure, but you shouldn't have to worry about that today. Anyway, I'll just leave this show up to him and add any other points that may come up on the NEWTs or OWLs. Esdras?"

Esdras nodded and stood up, walking towards the front of the classroom. Halfway down the aisle he rose up, floating over the ground as he removed his animagus spell, his body extending to his full height. He floated up to the dais and stood beside Professor Lupin. His voice echoed hollowly through the hall like a harsh whisper.

"As you all know, I am a Dementor. I'm also an animagus, my form is human. I was born on Azkaban in 1681 in the North Mountain caves, which is where all members of my family have been born for the last seven thousand years. Dementors are like any other mammalian creature, magical or otherwise, we have male Dementors and female Dementresses. Dementors bond for life and bear live children. We reach the age of majority at one hundred. We are provisionally immortal, there are very few ways to kill us and the most common form of death is by starvation." He paused for a moment, his echoing voice taking on an almost pleading tone. "Almost everything the

Ministry has ever told you is a horrible lie. We have families and friends and loved ones. We play games and sing songs and have a rich culture. We don't live in the dark, but we can, and we don't live in the damp. Our homes are warm and dry. We are just like mortals except we must consume souls to survive."

With a final sigh, the Dementor looked around. "I really don't know what you guys want to hear so I'll entertain any questions you all have."

A few hands shot up into the air, and he decided to start with a friendly face first. Nodding to Cho, he was happy when she smiled at him before asking her question. "How do you feed?"

Esdras looked back from beneath his hood. "Well, we draw energy from mortal souls, draining positive thoughts. The side effect is depression, in some cases, crippling. Eventually, the feeding response will even pull away magical powers. But we can also take energy from the Patronus charm. That took Azkaban scientists a little over eighty years to figure out and has been a miracle for our people. A well fed Dementor will only actively feed, but a hungry Dementor will unconsciously start passive feeding as a survival mechanism. Unfortunately, that's what happened the other day with you, Harry."

The black haired boy nodded and called out a question. "So how do we keep Dementors from feeding, then?"

The Dementor turned to look him in the eye. "You don't, really. The Patronus charm will feed a Dementor until he is full, then he will either move away or the Patronus will chase him off. Most of us are rather happy to get a free meal and will usually just eat and run."

Harry nodded and looked from the Dementor to Professor Lupin, seeming to resolve something in his head. Esdras moved on to another question. "Yes, Draco?"

Malfoy stared up at him with a rather sick sense of curiosity. "Can we see you without your hood?"

Shaking his head slowly, Esdras replied. "No, you wouldn't want to see that. When your father was in prison after the first war, he

accidentally saw Tarquin Sanguis without his hood on. It was hours before he stopped screaming.”

The blond rose and glared angrily at the Dementor. The Dementor merely shrugged.

He turned away from the fuming Malfoy and nodded to Alicia, who was sitting next to Katie. He pretended not to notice that she wouldn't look him in the hood. “If Dementors have no eyes, how can they see?”

Esdras began floating along the dais as he answered. “We see in terms of souls. The world to us, day or night, inside or outside, always looks like nighttime with a full moon illuminating it. Mortal souls glow white, Dementors appear pitch black, and other living things just blends into the background. It gives us enough to navigate through our surroundings, no matter what the conditions are. I'm still amazed by how bright things are with mortal vision.”

One of the Hufflepuffs spoke up next. “How is it that you are able to use a wand? I thought wands were only for human use.”

The Dementor laughed, producing a rasping sound that was rather unsettling. “Yes, the Ministry has a restriction on wand usage, but who is going to tell us to stop? As for how we are able to use them, we have special requirements. Dementor wands are always an evergreen wood, and always have dual cores. The first core is a regular magical core, the second is a piece of our own shroud, which is the covering that all Dementors are born with and which remains under our cloaks for our whole life.” He pulled back the sleeve of his cloak to reveal a pale, gauzelike material around his arm. “The shroud core specializes the wand for Dementor use and makes it impossible for a mortal to handle it.”

He took his wand from his cloak and tossed it to Professor Lupin. The professor attempted to catch it, but it slipped through his fingers. When he reached down to pick it up he was unable to get his fingers around it. After a moment, Esdras moved to retrieve his wand. “This allows us to carry our wands at the prison and not worry about the prisoners getting them.”

Mention of the prison seemed to open up a whole new world of questions. Pansy Parkinson took the forefront. "How long have you worked at the prison, and have you ever had to give the kiss?"

Only at this line of questioning did Esdras seem at all uncomfortable. "I've been an officer in the Azkaban Guard for about one hundred seventy five years. I hold the rank of captain under a naval ranking system, and I command the Thirteenth Infantry. My current assignment, though, is commander of operations for the Hogsmeade region." He avoided the second part of the question, though. "I'm even in uniform today. I have my rank insignia on my shoulders, captains wear silver vultures. And here is my division patch on my sleeve." He attempted to change the subject. "My cloak is actually charmed to prevent the spread of my powers. This is why only the people who walked close to me noticed a chill."

The Slytherins would not be deterred. This time Goyle spoke up. "But have you ever given the kiss to any prisoners?"

The Dementor sighed and put his hands beneath his hood, rubbing his face. "What is it with you Slytherins, anyway? Yes, I've had to administer the kiss on three separate occasions. They were all murderers and horrible people."

There was silence for a while before a familiar voice spoke up. Katie Bell asked her question in a very careful voice. "Are Dementors evil?"

Esdras paused to look at her. "Dementors could just as easily call mortals evil. The last Dementor war was over three thousand years ago, where as the majority of you were born under wartime conditions. Good or evil cannot be assigned across an entire society by the actions of a few bad souls. It would be the same as us judging your society by Voldemort." Esdras ignored the gasps at the mention of the name.

He continued to answer questions for the remainder of the period, but he did notice one thing. Katie was now looking him in the hood.

Chapter 7 – Getting Out the Door

That week went better, and Esdras found himself as a bit of a minor celebrity. He even brought out some of his old photo albums and showed off pictures of the small Dementor town that was on the other side of the island from the prison. Everyone especially enjoyed the photos of the day that Malachi DeCay had bet him a weekend off guard duty that he couldn't go the entire day floating upside down. Esdras had won the bet and claimed that to be the most enjoyable weekend of his life.

Some things hadn't gotten better. Katie was still avoiding him. He had decided that it would be best to let her come to her own conclusions and then decide how she felt about having a Dementor as a friend. Judging by the fact that it was Halloween, and the Saturday of the Hogsmeade weekend and she was still acting distant, he figured he had his answer.

So it was that Esdras popped out of the Ravenclaw common room and down the hall to the staircase where he met Cho and Roger waiting for the staircase to come by. Cho had a particular fire in her eyes. "Damned the thing, I want breakfast."

The Dementor merely shrugged and looked at his two teammates. "Do you trust me?"

They both nodded, and Esdras wrapped an arm around each of their waists. Taking to the air, he floated over the banister and descended slowly down the stairwell towards the ground. "You have no idea how many times I've wanted to do this rather than waiting."

Cho was laughing brightly, her spirits immediately lifted. "This is amazing! You might just be good to have around after all, mister Dementor."

And so it was that the Ravenclaw trio landed at the base of the stairs to the amazement of all around and proceeded to breakfast. As they loaded their plates, the mail came. The owl carrying the Daily Prophet came down and Esdras placed his money in the satchel, also giving the owl a bit of the crust of his toast before opening the paper. He paused for a second before sighing.

The sigh brought Cho to look over his shoulder at the headline. "Dementor menace inside Hogwarts? I don't feel menaced. Do you, Chambers?"

The chaser looked around with mock surprise. "Menaced? I don't feel menaced at all. In fact, I haven't seen a Dementor since we got here."

The Dementor did his best to laugh at the situation. "Thanks guys, but this isn't going to get any easier. Good to know I have friends, though."

This thought was interrupted when a large package dropped into his lap. Esdras was surprised to see Constance making to come in for a landing on his shoulder. When she had settled, he provided a few slices of bacon to his friend and she went on her way.

Roger looked over. "Well, what did you get?"

Esdras was busy pulling off the wrapping to reveal a note, and a new cloak. He looked at the note and read out loud, his voice steadily increasing in enthusiasm. "Please find enclosed the mark thirteen inhibitor cloak, incorporating a zero point protective radius. Also attached is a list of spells which should serve to insulate mortal clothing and previous cloak models with a zero point radius." He put down the note. "This is great; zero point radius means you guys won't feel cold around me anymore! Where was this last week?"

Cho looked up from her toast. "Funny, I've rather gotten used to it."

The Dementor rolled his eyes and pulled his old cloak off, exposing everyone in the room to a sheer chill before wrapping up in his new cloak. He eyed the shining silver vultures on the shoulders with pride. "If there's one thing we Dementors know, it's how to make a fine cloak. I'll put the spells on my clothes when I get back upstairs."

The lack of mention of Hogsmeade did not slip by Cho. She reached out and put a hand on Esdras' arm. "She still hasn't said anything?"

The Dementor inclined his head over towards the Gryffindor table. Katie was laughing with Angelina and Alicia as they walked out of the

room. She didn't even glance in their direction. "I think that says enough, don't you?"

He received a comforting smile from the seeker. "Well, you really ought to come with us then. I'll buy you a drink."

Esdras laughed and got up from the table. "Even on Azkaban the Dementor buys the Dementress her drinks. Yeah, I'll come with you guys. Let me put this old cloak up in my room. I won't be a minute."

The Dementor rose from the ground and floated out the door, flying up the stairwell the moment he was out of the Great Hall. Floating into the dorms, he stored his old cloak and the spell list away, and then turned to drift down the stairs and back out into the corridor.

As the door to the common room closed behind him, he saw a familiar form standing nearby. Katie watched intently as he approached, Esdras pretended to be interested in a nearby tapestry. "I'm sure Fred and George are waiting to go to Hogsmeade with you."

She cast her eyes to the ground. "They've already gone on ahead with Alicia and Angelina. I was under the impression that I had a date, but I guess I was wrong."

"I know the feeling. The girl I wanted to go with just stopped talking to me just because I'm an unholy hooded terror. Can you believe the nerve?"

Katie winced a little. "I'm sorry. I needed some time to think."

Esdras walked over to her and lifted her head slowly to look into her eyes. "It's alright, that's why I didn't push you. In case you haven't guessed already, I've forgiven you. Now are we going to go to Hogsmeade or not?"

The mortal smiled and laughed, punching the Dementor softly in the chest. "Of course we're going. Now hurry up."

The Dementor hustled along behind her until they reached the again missing staircase. Without a moment of hesitation, Esdras wrapped his arms around Katie and leaned forward, falling into the open

stairwell and gliding them down to the Entrance Hall. It was her screams that alerted everyone to their arrival.

Cho and the Ravenclaw team approached cautiously. "Alright there, Esdras?"

Esdras nodded even as Katie punched him in the arm. "I don't mind flying like that but for the love of Merlin, let me know before you do that to me!" Despite her protestations, she was smiling at him.

Bradley nudged the Dementor. "So I take it this means you won't be coming with us, then?"

The Dementor rolled his eyes and flicked the chaser on the forehead. "Genius level thinking, Bradley. You'll give Hermione a run for her money, you will."

Laughing, the group queued up and finally came to Filch, who was checking the names off the list. Esdras stood before the man and smiled politely. He glared and checked his list. "Demnin...Demnin...no Demnin on this list. You'll need a signed permission form if you want to go."

The Dementor stared blankly. "Permission form? I'm a three hundred twelve year old Dementor, I'm an adult by both magical and Azkaban law. I shouldn't even need to fill out the form, let alone get anyone to sign it. And seriously, who would sign it? Admiral Grim?"

The old man shrugged. "Rules are rules. Move along, you're holding up the line."

Esdras glared and stepped out of the line. He whispered into Katie's ear. "Watch this."

He walked away and turned the corner, when he was out of sight he took his Dementor form and floated back out into the Entrance Hall. Waving Katie out the door, he floated right past Filch, flashing him a none too polite hand gesture which caused a pack of first years to laugh raucously.

When far enough away from the door, Esdras returned to his mortal form and laughed brightly. "Serves him right."

They said their goodbyes to the Ravenclaws and made their way to the front gates of the castle where a pair of Dementors stood guard, checking all the students on their way in and out. At his approach, the Dementors snapped to attention and spoke in chorus. "*Good morning, Captain Demnin.*"

The animagus Dementor nodded and addressed them in turn. "*Good morning, Lieutenants.*" He continued walking. "*Lieutenant Morose, float with me for a moment. I need you to do something for me.*"

The lieutenant broke from his position and floated along side his commanding officer. Esdras conjured the hated permission form. "*Take a letter.*" He paused while the Dementor conjured up a piece of parchment and a quill, and then sighed heavily. "*To Admiral Judas Grim, from Captain Esdras Demnin. Admiral, please find enclosed a permission form which must be signed in order to allow me to visit Hogsmeade. Apparently when I agreed to become a student, they took it to the letter of the word. Esdras.*"

The soft whispering sound to his left meant that Lieutenant Morose was trying to keep from laughing. Esdras just sighed and handed the form to his subordinate. "*Take that and find Constance. And if you breathe a word about this to anyone, I'll have your cloak as a tablecloth.*"

The Dementor lieutenant snapped to attention and floated off towards the lake. Esdras groaned and flipped his hood up. Katie leaned gently against him. "What was that all about?" The smile on her lips meant she had some idea.

Keeping his eyes to the road ahead, Esdras hedged. "Would you believe me if I told you it was a military dispatch and that I would have to kill you if I revealed the information?"

Katie shook her head, her voice playful. "No." They walked for a little while more, and then she turned towards him. "That was your language?"

Esdras nodded. "Azkabaaner. It's been spoken on the island for as long as there have been Dementors to speak it."

She looked impressed at this and thought for a few seconds. "Teach it to me?"

The Dementor turned his head and looked surprised. He nodded and after a few steps was smiling once again.

Chapter 8 – First Hogsmeade

The town of Hogsmeade was a truly exciting experience for Esdras. In mortal Muggle towns, he would be completely unseen and normally in mortal magical communities, people would run away from him. So it was a very pleasant surprise when the elderly woman whom Esdras helped after she dropped her bag thanked him with a smile.

The pair walked through the streets of the small town, lazily looking into the happily decorated storefronts and occasionally stepping inside. Esdras patiently waited in Gladrag's while Katie tried on a few things. His inquiry into what Muggles referred to as a "hoodie" was met by a confused look from the salesperson.

They made the complete rounds that most third year students just arrived to Hogsmeade made. From the shops along the high road to the shrieking shack and finally back to the Three Broomsticks. Inside, they approached the bar and waited for the service of the harried Madame Rosemerta. When she made it to them, she gave them a friendly smile and stared Esdras right in the eyes. "Oh my, don't you have pretty eyes. What will it be for you two?"

Esdras blushed furiously, something he didn't know he could do. "Do you have green mint beer?" At the confused look of the proprietor, Esdras sighed. "Two butterbeers, please." He turned to Katie. "I guess I knew she wouldn't have it, but I had to try."

Katie leaned against the bar, facing him. "What is green mint beer, anyway?"

The Dementor smiled. "It's exactly what it sounds like. A Dementor beer made with Azkaban green mint. It comes in different strengths and is very tasty."

Katie merely nodded to her companion and turned as Rosemerta returned with their mugs. "Well, that'll be two Sickles." Esdras brushed away Katie's hand as she reached into her pocket and started digging through his. Rosemerta was looking below the bar to find a bar cloth and continued speaking to her patrons. "What do you

two think about that Dementor at Hogwarts? It must be horrible for you all. I know they're killing my business here."

Esdras paused for a moment and carefully placed the two Sickles on the countertop. "Oh, I don't think he's all that bad. I've had lunch with him. He seems like a real stand up kind of guy. Don't you agree, Katie?"

Rosemerta caught Katie's enthusiastic nod as she popped back up with cloth in hand. She narrowed her eyes. "I don't know what it is with you kids today, but no one has said that they particularly fear him. In fact, that group over there thinks he's the greatest thing since the self stirring cauldron."

The couple turned to face the direction she was indicating, and saw the Ravenclaw Quidditch team causing a minor commotion. Esdras shrugged. "They would, I suppose."

The barkeep looked confused. "Why is that?"

Taking Katie's free hand, Esdras rose up into a low float and backed away from the bar. "That's because we're on the Quidditch team together. A pleasant afternoon to you, and I pray that business picks up. Good day."

Leaving the stunned barmaid behind and taking to the ground again, Esdras led Katie to an empty table. The Dementor eyed his butterbeer curiously and took a tentative sip, then drained half his glass. His companion smiled. "Like it, do you?"

He nodded and smiled. "It's nice. I figured I wouldn't go through the trouble of proving my age to get a firewhiskey."

She laughed and drank some of her butterbeer. "Yes, you've already had enough trouble verifying who and how old you are."

The Dementor planted face to palm and rubbed slowly. "The irony is almost palpable."

Laughing, Katie leaned across the table and planted a kiss on his cheek. "Feeling better, then?"

Looking for the entire world like it was the most obvious question in the world, Esdras shrugged. "How could I not?"

It was nearing dinnertime and the students had begun to move in packs back towards the school. Esdras and Katie were walking together down the road, enjoying the resolution of a few uncomfortable seconds when Esdras had tried to find her hand to hold. They had matched strides now and were most comfortable.

Into this idyllic scene walked Draco Malfoy from behind. More precisely, Crabbe and Goyle walked into the scene and promptly separated the Dementor from the mortal, earning a confused Azkabaaner curse and an odd look. "Can I help you?"

The blonde Slytherin sneered. "Yes, you can. You lied about my father, you cloaked freak." He turned to face Katie. "And what do you see in him, anyway? It's hard to tell who the bigger menace is."

Ignoring Malfoy, Esdras turned to Crabbe and Goyle. "Honestly, what did he say to you two to get you to do this? You know I'm a Dementor, right? I'm more powerful than both of you combined by far." He turned to face his accuser. "Are you mental?"

Malfoy smirked triumphantly. "You can't feed while she's here, not unless you want her to hurt, too."

The Dementor considered this. "Good point."

With a flurry of cloaks, he dropped his mortal guise and grabbed Malfoy by the face, holding him at arms length, four feet above the ground. Muffled screams could barely be heard as he clawed at his captor's arm.

Esdras again turned to a now terrified Crabbe and Goyle. "Leave us, please." They ran, and the Dementor addressed the one in his grasp. "Draco, this is what Dementors do when they're angry. I'll explain it carefully. I don't care about you at all, you cannot hurt me. But if you say anything about her, hurt or impede her in any way, I'll make sure the house of Malfoy dies with you. Now go cool off." He withdrew his wand. "Expelliarmus!"

Releasing his head at the moment the spell took effect, he watched Draco Malfoy go sailing gracefully a full one hundred feet out and into the middle of the lake. Katie watched as he resumed mortal form with her arms crossed. "Oh, and I suppose you can just come rushing to the rescue like I'm completely helpless, right?"

Esdras did a good impression of a fish for a few seconds. "Helpless? You had Crabbe and Goyle. I let you have two of them!"

Punching him lightly in the shoulder she glared sternly. "Only after you scared them off. I mean honestly. And how did you get Malfoy to fly so far?"

The Dementor shrugged. "My people are very powerful and so are our wands."

They continued their argument all the way back to the castle, hand in hand.

The library of Hogwarts was one of the most comprehensive in the wizarding world. Even still, Esdras was skeptical that he'd find the book he was looking for. His previous visits hadn't been in vain, but this book was a little more specific. He paused at the barrier to the restricted section and changed forms, his Dementor form allowed him to pass through the barrier unimpeded.

Gliding slowly down the aisle, he turned right and proceeded down a particularly gloomy row. Looking slowly across the titles, he leaned down and then floated up to see the top shelf. There, wedged between Aquatic Languages for Beginners and The Giant Book of the Giant Language was his target, Azkabaaner for Casual Conversation.

He pulled the book from the shelf and opened it. The book greeted him with a traditional whispered greeting. Closing the book, Esdras returned to the floor and floated back to the barrier. Once free, he transformed and took to his feet, walking quickly to the table where Katie sat waiting. "Here you are. This is a good enough start until I can get you some proper language books from home."

Katie took the book and opened it as Esdras sat down beside her. She looked silently through it for a few moments before coming to a page. She concentrated on it and haltingly spoke. "*Thank you.*"

He looked suitably impressed. "Very good, for a mortal."

She smiled playfully back at him. "Well, what can I say? I guess I'm just good with my tongue."

Esdras' glowing green eyes bugged out for a second before he coughed nervously. He looked back down at the table, and when he looked up again, Katie was closer...much closer. "Katie?"

She was so close now that her brown eyes reflected the glow of his green eyes. "Tell me, Esdras, how do Dementors show affection?"

He tried to answer, but was distracted by the feel of her hand taking his own and squeezing gently. He cleared his throat, and when he spoke his accent was thick, his voice a gritty whisper. "We are...we are not unlike mortals. We hug, we kiss." He sighed softly at her reaction. "A kiss is just a kiss, but the Kiss is different. *Kiss* and *kiss* are two different words with very different connotations."

Katie looked to her book for a second, and then closed the last bit of distance. Esdras could now feel her breath on his lips. "Then *kiss* me."

Esdras leaned in...and jerked away suddenly as the voice of Professor McGonagall was magically amplified throughout the school. "All students please report to your common rooms immediately. Gryffindor house students, please report to the Great Hall. Your heads of house will arrive momentarily. Captain Esdras Demnin, please place your troops on defense condition two and report immediately to the Great Hall."

The Dementor was in the air in a flash. He turned to look at Katie, his face hard set and ready for battle. With a quick tug, he removed his cloak and wrapped it around her before the chill became too much. "Go. Take my cloak and give it to Harry when you see him. It works both ways. It'll protect him so long as he's on the other side of it. Something is up, and I have a feeling he may need the protection."

Katie grabbed his arm before he could float off. Gone was the previous look in her eyes, replaced now by fear. "Esdras, be safe."

He nodded and turned to float away, but stopped short. Turning back around to face her, he leaned in and softly kissed her. Then with a smile, flew off through the library door, drawing his wand and calling out spells in Azkabaaner that she couldn't even begin to understand.

When Katie arrived in the Great Hall, it was a madhouse. Most of Gryffindor house was there, and the other three houses were beginning to file in. Quickly, she found Angelina and Alicia. "What's going on? What happened?"

Alicia was nearly in tears. "It was Sirius Black. He attacked the Fat Lady."

Katie gasped and looked around nervously. The other students all seemed to be equally shaken by this news. Finally, she found Harry and rushed over to him. "Harry, Esdras said to give you this. It's his cloak and it will protect you."

Harry looked on as she fumbled with the clasp at the neck and finally put it over his shoulders, dropping her book in the process. Hermione bent to pick it up. "Azkabaaner for Casual Conversation? Esdras got this for you, didn't he?"

Katie nodded and blushed, taking the book back and holding the text close. "Yes, he said it would be a good start until he could get some proper books from the island."

Hermione smiled and knelt down to rummage through her ever present school bag and pulled out three thick tomes. "He did the same for me, but I wanted to learn more about Dementors in general. He got me The Dementor Medical Reference, The Myths of Azkaban: Stories of the Ancients, and Azkaban: A History."

Katie sat down beside Hermione and began to idly thumb through her new book, even though she was too concerned really to take in anything on the pages. It was a few moments before the whole

school was assembled and the tables moved. She listened intently as the headmaster explained the circumstances.

The kindly wizard addressed them calmly. "As you may have guessed, Sirius Black was spotted in the school. You need not worry, you are safe and the ghosts and professors will sweep the school. In the meantime, I suggest you all get settled and get some sleep."

With a flick of his wand, ranks of sleeping bags appeared on the floor, and the students began to claim their spaces. Katie noticed the headmaster walking quickly towards the Gryffindor aisle. She had some idea what was about to happen when he walked right towards her. "Miss Bell, I don't suppose you know where Captain Demnin is?"

Katie shook her head. "No sir, the last I saw of him was in the library when the announcement was made to come here." She blushed at the memory. "He floated off soon after that."

The headmaster nodded and any response he was going to make was cut off by the doors to the Great Hall opening and the air growing colder and darker. Muffled screams were heard as students caught sight of the form gliding in through the door.

It was obviously a Dementor, but the black cloak was harder and didn't flow, instead making a soft metallic sound as it moved. It clung tightly to the skeletal body and provided bulk. Thick black gauntlets with metal spikes protected its hands. It held a ten foot tall polearm with a sinister scimitar shaped platinum blade on one end and a sharpened platinum spear tip on the other. But the most striking feature was the hood; it didn't drape over the face but fit closely and blended seamlessly into a blank, obsidian mask.

Katie shivered violently as the figure approached and the cold increased. All around her, she noticed others succumbing to the effect as well. All except Harry, who stood unaffected in the Dementor cloak he had been loaned.

The figure glided to a halt in front of the headmaster and saluted. "My apologies, headmaster. I have alerted the Marine units, they are at defense condition two and presently in perimeter defense formation around the grounds."

Dumbledore nodded, seemingly unaffected by the cold. "Very good, Captain. We will begin sweeping the school immediately." He regarded the Dementor for a moment. "An armor cloak? I've never seen one before."

Esdras nodded under his hood. "Yes, they aren't exactly standard issue for guards. It's a bit of a family heirloom, this one."

Katie rushed forward, ignoring the cold and grasping him about the waist and resting her head on his chest, the only part she could reach. She relaxed her grip as she felt him sink to the ground and wrap his arms around her. When her head finally rested against his shoulder, she opened her eyes and looked up. A pale green glow was evident behind the face shield of the armor cloak.

She barely registered that the other professors had gathered around the Dementor. She lightened her grip and stepped away slightly as Dumbledore began to address them. "We will sweep the castle from bottom to top. The farther from the entrances we drive him, the less chances to escape he will have." The headmaster turned to the scowling form of the potions master. "Professor Snape, you are the most knowledgeable about the dungeons. Please take Professor Flitwick and work your way from the top down." Turning to face the other professors he continued. "Everyone else, divide into pairs and begin scouring every hall, room, cupboard, and suit of armor. Mister Demnin, do you have anything to add?"

The Dementor nodded, his voice coming as a muted echo from beneath the battle mask. "The Seventh Marine will be prepared to move below ground should we find Black in the dungeons. The Ninth is at ground level and Twelfth will be circling in the skies above. Should you need them, just fire sparks out a window and you'll be covered in cloaks in less than ten seconds."

With mortals and Dementor in agreement, the crew began to walk towards the door, leaving a few teachers in the Great Hall to keep the peace. Esdras floated off with the professors, his pike resting gently over his shoulder. He turned back to look at Katie and winked, one glowing green orb disappearing in the blackness of the mask before transforming into his natural form.

Chapter 9 – The House of Demnin

Time passed slowly in the Great Hall. Katie, having caught up on all her homework, was practicing her pronunciation of the basic sounds of the Azkabaaner language. Every so often, the book would chip in and help her with a particular sound. Beside her, Hermione sat with *The Myths of Azkaban* open on her lap. She flipped a page and gasped quietly, earning stares from Harry and Ron.

The three slowly leaned in to look at the page that was open in front of Hermione. Before them was a reproduction of an exquisite painting, the central figure of which was a Dementor cloaked in shades of silver and white. The most striking feature, though, was the gaping hole in its chest. In its hand was a pike that was dangerously similar to the one that Esdras had carried with him.

Hermione quietly read the caption below the picture. “This painting, dating from the Warring Houses period shows the god of death, Demnin, establishing his house and renouncing his divinity, granting Dementors immortality.”

Katie reached out slowly and touched the page as Harry spoke in a quiet whisper. “Esdras’ last name is Demnin. What do you think that means?”

Ron smirked and leaned back. “Well, obviously it means that he is some sort of Dementor god or something.”

Hermione huffed quietly. “Obviously not, since this Demnin gave up his divinity.” She turned the page and read more. “Apparently, he surrendered his divinity because he fell in love. Without a god of death, Dementors became immortal. In their anger, the other Dementor gods established the provisions that all Dementors must abide by to maintain their immortality.”

Her eyes widened as she continued the tale. “It says here that after he renounced his divinity and founded his house, he was crowned as king and that his house held the crown until the Treaty of Edinburgh.”

Katie looked over her shoulder. “What happened to him?”

A quick ruffling of pages and Hermione had the best answer she could find. "It's very vague. It only says that he surrendered the crown to his son and left to walk among the mortals with his wife. Listen to this, that pike is known as the Glaive of Silence, and can only be carried by the true king of Azkaban. The weapon is too heavy to be carried by any other Dementor. It is the only weapon capable of killing a Dementor and is the symbol of royal power."

Harry shook his head. "So if that pike we saw him carrying is the Glaive of Silence?"

Hermione finished the sentence. "That would mean that Esdras is the rightful king of Azkaban, or would be if not for the Treaty of Edinburgh."

Katie reached across Hermione and grabbed the hulking text of Azkaban: A History with shaking hands. Opening it to the index in the back she flipped the pages until she found what she was looking for. "Here we are, Demnin. God of death and..." Her breath caught in her throat and she looked up to the others. "...the royal house."

Hermione shifted the text into her lap and turned to the proper page. The chapter presented the heraldry of each house and gave a detailed summary. There, they were greeted by a picture of an ornate coat of arms surmounted with a helm shaped like the hood of an armor cloak and a crown of platinum. A Dragon and a Lethifold stood to left and right as supporters. She began to read quietly. "The royal house of Demnin has stood as a bastion of strength and stability since its inception in the mortal year 4121 BC. Founded by the god of death after the renunciation of his powers, the house of Demnin was unanimously proclaimed the royal house by the councils of major and minor houses. As monarchs, the kings of the Demnin crown were well known for displaying both fairness and power in their reigns."

Katie cut her off. "Alright, I get the point. But there's still no proof that Esdras is the king."

Ron shrugged. "Well, you could ask him, you know."

The withering glare he received matched any of Hermione's. Katie calmly returned to reading her language book for a while longer before retiring to her sleeping bag.

The magical moon hung high in the sky of the Great Hall when the door opened to reveal a mass of cloaked figures in a heated, whispered argument. The lead figure with long, greasy black hair was hissing his attack. "Well, Sirius Black shouldn't have even been able to get into Hogwarts in the first place. We wouldn't be put in this position if you were doing your job, Captain Demnin."

The Dementor sighed and unlatched the mask of his armor cloak, letting the mask and hood fall back to reveal his natural face. "Well, I would be doing my job more efficiently if I weren't writing fifteen inch potions essays, Professor Snape." He noticed the look of shock on the potions master's face as he regarded his unmasked head. "Don't stare, it's not polite."

The professor glared. "It's not exactly an everyday sight, Captain Demnin, to see a Dementor without his hood."

Esdras remained impassive. "It's nothing you haven't seen before, prisoner epsilon gamma 342. You would have seen it a lot more often if you hadn't been pardoned."

The mention of the Snape's prisoner number brought a silence among the professors that was deafening. Professor Flitwick finally broke the silence by wisely changing the topic. "So it is true...no eyes, no ears, no nose. I had thought you would look scarier, personally. But I do believe you should keep your hood on. Some of the students may not react as well as us hardened types."

The edges of the Dementor's mouth turned up in the closest approximation to a smile physically possible for his species. "Yes, sir, but no one is awake. I will take my chances. The armored hood is not the most comfortable. I'll have to get it properly fitted when I go back to the island."

The professor nodded and reached up to pat him on the knee. "Get some rest, then. We'll look after everything for the rest of the night."

Esdras nodded and placed the bladed portion of his pike into the sleeve of his armor cloak and pushed slowly, the entire ten foot weapon disappearing easily into the folds of fabric. His burden removed, he rose into the air and floated down the aisle toward the end of the Ravenclaw row.

Halfway down the aisle, his progress was impeded when a hand reached up and grabbed the hem of his cloak. He slowed to a halt and turned around to see the solid silver glow of Katie Bell through the darkness of his vision. "I waited up for..." Her gasp was expected.

Esdras turned quickly away. "I'm sorry. I thought everyone was asleep. Let me put my mortal face on."

Her whisper stopped him in his tracks. "Don't." She paused for a few seconds. "Let me see you?"

He sighed and slowly turned, the pale silver moonlight illuminating his face. Deathly grey skin stretched tautly over barely hidden bone. Below his sparse white hair, the skin dipped seamlessly into the cold, black eye sockets and left only a small opening where the nose and ears would be. The mouth formed a perfect circle where a quiet rasping sound emanated. He spoke in his quiet whisper, his mouth unmoving. "Know thine enemy, Katie."

Katie glared and looked him squarely where his eyes would be. "I see no enemy, Esdras. You should know that by now. I think...I think you're quite handsome."

He knelt to a low hover, his face mere inches from hers. He brought with him a lingering smell of decay. Again, his mouth remained stationary as he spoke. "This is no joke, Katie. This is who I am, Esdras Tarsus Demnin, a Dementor of Azkaban. I am not the mortal boy you kissed this evening. I'm sorry if I led you to believe otherwise, I should have let you see what's under this cloak before we started to get close."

Any further argument was halted when she leaned up and kissed him softly on the cheek. In the silence, she returned to her sleeping bag. "I'll have you know I understand exactly what I'm getting into and I

wouldn't be getting into it if I didn't want to. Now you need to get to sleep, mister Dementor of Azkaban."

Esdras nodded silently and rose, floating off in a daze. As Katie rolled over in her sleeping bag, she smiled slightly, confident in her decision.

The next morning, the only clue that something had been amiss was the massive amount of coffee that the professors and Esdras drank, the latter drinking twice as much as the former combined. The Dementor sat at the Ravenclaw table with his hood up, drinking straight from the coffee pot while Cho was discussing the upcoming test in History of Magic. The fact that he wasn't paying attention was brought to light when she poked him in the side with her wand, causing him to jump three feet into the air and remain there. "What was that for?"

Cho looked sternly at him. "You weren't paying attention to me."

Esdras floated down and traded his empty pot for a new one before looking at her. "I had a rough night, alright?"

The Ravenclaw seeker's eyes bugged out. "I'll say you did. Have you looked at yourself in a mirror today?"

He gave her a questioning glance and shook his head. She produced a mirror from her bag and handed it to him. He looked at it and groaned as the mirror shrieked. He had tried to apply his animagus form this morning, but had obviously failed. His skin tone was mortal, but he lacked a nose. His eyes glowed, yes, but one had no pupil and the other glowed through seamless skin covering the eye socket. He sighed, and noticed that his mortal mouth didn't move when he talked. "Oh man, I thought the world looked different this morning."

Cho patted his shoulder softly. "Don't worry about it. You can take a nap during lunch and try again later."

Finishing the coffee pot and reaching for a nearby teapot, Esdras groaned. "I'd sleep in History, but we've got that damned test. At least it's on stuff I lived through." Thinking for a second more, he dropped

his head to the tabletop. "Katie will be there. I don't want her to see me like this."

"What does it matter? Didn't you show her your face last night?"

The Dementor looked up in shock. "How did you find out about that? And on the morning after, no less."

The girl shrugged and gave him her most innocent smile. "I have connections." She looked at him seriously for a second. "Esdras, I think I can speak for everyone in the house. But if you ever want to show us, we'll be fine with it. It can't be easy to keep up the spell for long periods of time."

The Dementor finished the teapot off and stood up, shouldering his backpack. "Thank you, Cho. But it really isn't a pleasant sight. And I really don't want it to become a novelty. I don't want to be asked to show it off."

The girl linked her arm with his and squeezed lightly. "We wouldn't do that, Esdras. You're our friend. And speaking of which, some of us were wondering if you could get us some Azkabaaner books for the common room. It's always good to pick up a second language, you know."

The Dementor laughed and nodded. "Just wait until you try to learn it."

Chapter 10 – Ravenclaw vs. Slytherin

He had taken Cho's advice after a week of prodding. Anyone in his house who had asked him got the opportunity to see his normal face. He was shocked when no one ran screaming, no one fainted, and no one stopped talking to him. If anything, things had gotten easier for him. So for this reason, Esdras found himself lying upon a hospital bed, with neither a cloak nor an animagus spell, waiting for Madame Pomfrey with his teammates.

It really had all been an accident. Even the best Quidditch players get into accidents on the pitch. It was lucky for Esdras and for Ravenclaw that this accident happened during practice. He had extended his cloak like a sail to slow himself down and fire an incoming Bludger. Britten, the other beater, hadn't looked behind him when he spun to fire the other Bludger. The cloak had slowed the Bludger down some, but it had still landed squarely on Esdras' back from almost fifty feet away. The impact knocked him from his broom and he fell slowly through the air, bouncing until he came to rest on the grassy pitch.

And now he was here, in the hospital bed in his normal form, conserving his strength. The transformation affected everything, even his Quidditch robes. The normally sharp black and blue colors were dull and tattered, the consequence of transforming with him. They would return to normal when he restored his animagus spell.

Esdras followed the bright silver glows of his teammates as they paced back and forth. Britten still hadn't stopped apologizing. Esdras looked up at the gathered mass and cleared his throat. "Everyone shut up. I'll be fine."

Roger looked sternly at Esdras. "You'll be fine? You broke two ribs, one of which punctured a lung, and you broke your shoulder blade. And I don't even know what Madame Pomfrey was talking about with those Dementor injuries."

Laughing, the Dementor leaned back. "The Bludger shattered one of my dorsal float bladders. That's why I'm not floating right now. If I tried, I'd be off balance."

Cho glared. "How can you laugh at a time like this? The Slytherin game is tomorrow and we were counting on you to be our secret weapon. Now we'll have to use Elric, and you know how bad he is."

The Dementor continued to laugh as Madame Pomfrey approached with the bottle of Skelegrow. She glared at him as well. "And what do you think is so funny? You should be thankful I thought to get you to put your spells on a set of blankets or this potion would be ice by now."

He gazed up at her with his sightless grey face and did his best to look contrite. "Actually, it wouldn't. I just finished with the last of the spells this morning. All my clothing is protected now. I don't need a cloak; I can be just like a mortal."

Her glare softened as she poured the potion and changed the subject. "You Quidditch types are all the same. You go getting hurt and expect me to be there for you all the time. Now, drink up."

Esdras gagged on the foul liquid and coughed once it was all gone. "That's the worst thing I've ever tasted, and I've eaten in the prison cafeteria on Azkaban."

The nurse handed him a glass of water, which he drank down quickly before returning to his prone position and closing his eyes. Within seconds, a warm silver glow began to suffuse his chest, moving upward to encompass his damaged bones and organs. Madame Pomfrey watched on in awe as the glow grew in intensity, and then faded away.

Once the glow was gone, Esdras slowly began to rise up, until he was floating a foot over the bed. He sat up slowly, the blanket falling from his chest as he stretched. "Could someone get me my cloak, please?"

Madame Pomfrey looked at him in shock. "Oh no you don't." She cast a triage spell on him and waited for the results. A glowing form of his Dementor body hovered over his prone form, glowing in shades of green. "How is this possible? These injuries would have taken most of the day to heal and at least another day or two of therapy."

Taking his cloak from Cho, Esdras flipped it over his shoulders and floated up from the bed, smoothing his Quidditch robes beneath him. "Dementors are provisionally immortal for a reason."

Whatever the reason may have been was interrupted by a crying form, tearing into the Hospital Wing. Katie Bell moved at top speed and leapt over a bed with the natural grace of a chaser. She came to a halt before him, relief mixed in with the tears in her eyes. "Esdras! Hermione saw them carrying you in and ran to tell me that you were hurt and I ran here so fast and I was so scared. Why aren't you in bed? You should be in bed so Madame Pomfrey can heal you."

Esdras changed to his mortal form and smiled brightly. "Remember, you have an immortal boyfriend."

Katie stepped close and placed a hand on his shoulder, squeezing lightly, and then trailing under the cloak to his back. When she was satisfied, she fell into his arms and hugged him tightly. "Hermione said it was bad, that you weren't floating."

He wrapped his arms around her and returned her hug. "No, it wasn't bad. And don't you worry; it takes a lot to hurt me." He looked around at the assembled lot. "Now, how about dinner?"

Katie sat at the dinner table next to Hermione. Between them sat the Dementor Medical Reference. The page showed a cutaway view of a Dementor. Hermione pointed to a glowing silver organ located below the stomach. "This one, the supersolenoid organ, it's the energy to matter conversion center. As long as the Dementor has enough energy, he can heal almost any injury to his body. Healing time varies depending on what the injury is, it can be anywhere from immediate to a span of days."

The chaser regarded the picture quietly, and then flipped to the chapter describing the supersolenoid in greater detail. "So that's why he wasn't able to heal the broken ribs without the Skelegrow, he hadn't seen Professor Lupin yet to feed." She flipped the page. "What do you mean by almost any injury?"

Hermione reached for a roll. "One roll at a time in your mouth, Ron. Honestly." She took a bite of her roll and spoke idly. "Major damage to the supersolenoid can't be repaired on its own, the injured Dementor has to either enter a healing bond with no less than four other Dementors or put on a stasis cloak until a healing bond can be performed. Other than that, it can heal most anything else, even amputation or decapitation."

Katie looked on in total shock. "You're kidding me. Esdras could..." She looked around cautiously before leaning in closer. "Esdras could lose his head and still be fine? How is that possible?"

Hermione flipped a few pages forward in the book and tapped a picture of a canister of glowing silver liquid. "Ichor, the secondary blood of Dementors; Dementor blood is black, the ichor is a glowing silver. It's basically a liquefied soul resin formed by the supersolenoid that accelerates tissue growth and decreases tissue aging. It's the same reason why Esdras, who is three hundred twelve, acts like he's in his late teens. Ichor slows Dementor physical and mental growth after maturity." They sat in silence for a while before Hermione posed her own question. "How are the language lessons going?"

Reaching into her book bag, Katie pulled out a small book and handed it to Hermione. "Today I read my first book in Azkabaaner. Granted it's a children's book, but Esdras said I did wonderfully."

Opening the thin text, Hermione was greeted by a picture of a cloudy day on a rocky island. In the center of the picture was a field of green and what looked like a black cloak frolicking in the middle. "That's a Lethifold."

"Yes, it is. This book is called The Lethifold and the Mint Field. It's apparently a pretty standard children's story on Azkaban, like The Wizard from Kent Goes to Market."

Ron perked up at the mention of this. "I loved that book when I was a kid."

Harry looked up from his potions text. "When you were a kid? You still have it in your trunk in the dorm room."

Ron sputtered. "It's a classic. Like that Gold Eggs and Meat book you told me about."

Hermione laughed. "You mean Green Eggs and Ham, Ron."

The redhead shrugged. "Whatever."

By this point, Harry had gotten his hands on the Azkabaaner children's book. The picture in front of him showed the Lethifold sunning itself on a rock. "It's funny, isn't it? They're just like us in so many ways."

"All the ways that count, right?" The voice that interrupted them came from the upside down hovering form of the resident Dementor. "That book has always been a favorite of mine."

Katie leaned behind Hermione and kissed Esdras before he righted himself, sitting cross legged and hovering at bench height in the aisle. Harry looked at the book again. "Yeah, Dementors are similar in all the ways that count. But you still scare me."

Esdras looked carefully at him, glowing green eyes regarding green eyes. "Ask yourself this question, Harry. Do Dementors scare you, or does the effect we have on you scare you?" He smiled and patted him on the shoulder before rising and turning to Katie. "I've got the match tomorrow, so I'm going to turn in early. Cheer for me tomorrow?"

Katie pulled the Dementor out of the air and snogged him senseless. "What do you think?"

The next morning, Esdras stood in the locker room adjusting gloves and tightening the leather wrist strap that kept his Bludgerbat connected. On his face, he wore a pair of glasses with cobalt tinted lenses. Cho looked curiously at him. "Esdras, I've been meaning to ask, what are those glasses for?"

Peering over the edge of the lenses, he looked down at her. "They're charmed to allow me to better see the balls. Since our vision is as dark as night, we use a face shield charmed to make the Quaffle and

Bludgers glow. Since I have ears in this form, I made a pair of glasses. I don't really need them when I'm using my mortal eyes, but I'm so used to seeing the Bludgers glow that it's weird to play without it."

The seeker smirked. "The fact that you look cool has nothing to do with it?"

The beater shouldered his broom and smiled. "Nothing at all."

Roger called the team over for a last minute pep talk. "Alright guys, we can do this. Slytherin is tough, but we're tougher. We have experience on our side, over two centuries worth between the seven of us. This is the best Ravenclaw team I've ever seen. Let's get out there and show them what we can do."

Esdras put his hand into the center of the circle, and the others followed suit. He spoke something in the harsh whispers of Azkabaaner, and then translated for his friends, his voice echoing with his native accent. "Death to the opposition!"

The others laughed and repeated his chant before shouldering their brooms. They stood shoulder to shoulder in front of the curtain and waited for their call. Slytherin was called first, and there was a short, polite applause. The noise eventually began to grow louder until they could just barely hear Lee Jordan make their announcement. "And now entering the pitch for their first match of the year, Ravenclaw!"

The curtain parted and they mounted their brooms and zoomed out onto the pitch in formation. They made a slow circle around the pitch to the general accolades of the crowd. As they approached the Gryffindor stands, Esdras looked carefully, and found Katie Bell in the first row, cheering madly. He broke formation and flew closer to the stands. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a small bundle and tossed it right at Katie, which she caught easily as he flew off to rejoin his team.

Fred and George sat behind her and peered over her shoulders. They questioned her in stereo. "Well, what is it?"

Laughing, she opened the package and pulled out a soft woolen scarf knitted in the Ravenclaw colors of dark blue and silver, but with an added band of black. She gasped as the silver parts of the scarf began to glow of their own accord. She quickly removed her own scarlet and gold scarf and replaced it with the Ravenclaw/Azkaban hybrid and began cheering louder, joined by the twins behind her.

At the center of the pitch, the game was getting ready to start. Madame Hooch had the Quaffle in her hands, and she spoke under the sonorous charm so all could hear her. "Now I want a good, clean match." She looked up to regard the Dementor. "Mister Demnin, I know Dementor Quidditch rules are a little different, but I'll be expecting you to abide by mortal rules for this game."

The Dementor saluted in understanding and held his Bludgerbat to the ready. The referee nodded and punched the button that released the Bludgers into the air before tossing the Quaffle into the air to start the game.

Katie was torn watching the action, listening to the commentary, and making sure Esdras was okay. Somewhere in the background she could hear Lee calling out the play by play. "And Roger Davies of Ravenclaw has the Quaffle, passes to Chambers, passes to Bradley, loses it to Montague from Slytherin with a Bludger from Goyle. Bad luck, there. Montague has it, passes to Flint, and Flint and Montague are both down in a double strike by Demnin! That was incredible! Bradley has the Quaffle, makes the shot past Craven, ten points Ravenclaw!"

Cheers erupted through the stadium as the players reset for another run. High above the action, Malfoy called down to the two Slytherin beaters. "Crabbe, Goyle, just like we planned it in practice. Don't muck it up!"

Lee kept calling the plays. "Warrington of Slytherin has the Quaffle. Demnin fires a Bludger but he avoids it. And Crabbe and Goyle have the Bludgers, they both shoot..."

Crabbe and Goyle, from opposite ends of the field and with simultaneous shots, hit both Bludgers towards Esdras. With only one bat, Esdras spun to strike the first one. With his left hand he reached

out and caught the Bludger. The angry ball struggled helplessly in his grip. The crowd fell silent, and most of the action on the pitch stopped as the two teams stared open mouthed at the Dementor. As quickly as they stopped, the cheering and action on the pitch started back up again. Lee was screaming the commentary now. "This is incredible, Demnin has the Bludger in hand and he's chasing down Malfoy! He throws it and just barely misses. Judging from the looks of it, folks, he meant that as a warning shot."

Malfoy pulled up on his broom and gasped. The Bludger had passed just inches from his face. He accelerated and gained height over the pitch, approaching Goyle. Flying right up to him, he grabbed him by the front of his robes and shouted at him. "You follow that Dementor and hit him when he's down."

Goyle gave him a blank look. "How will I know when he's down?"

Malfoy sneered and pushed him away. "Because he'll be on the ground, you great oaf. Now go!"

In the Gryffindor stands, Harry glanced upward with a curious expression. "What is Malfoy doing up there?"

Hermione idly looked up from her book. Non Gryffindor matches rarely excited her. "Looking for the Snitch, most likely."

Harry narrowed his eyes, but didn't bother to look at her. "I'd know what that looks like, thank you. He's not looking for the Snitch, it's like he's waiting for something to happen. He's got his wand out."

She followed his eyes up to the airborne figure in green. She followed the direction his wand was pointing. Her eyes fell to the pitch just in time to see Esdras, who had been skimming a few feet over the pitch, take a nosedive into the grass. He bounced up to float height and skidded along in midair, coming to a rest against the Hufflepuff grandstands.

Over the screams of Katie Bell, she could hear Harry and Ron calling the foul. "He used a Vertinverta curse on him! Come on!"

Hermione tried to calm them down. "Do you think maybe Esdras could have accidentally over steered?"

She was met with glares. Ron looked around Harry and spoke sternly to her. "You may know everything about everything else, but we know Quidditch. The only thing that could have done that to a flier as good as Esdras was a Vertinverta."

The impact stunned Esdras, and he could feel that his collarbone had broken. He closed his eyes and concentrated on healing the damage. Once the process was started, he opened his eyes and turned his head to follow the match. The only thing he saw was Goyle, his arm drawn back to fire a Bludger.

The force of the point blank impact pushed Esdras down onto the ground again, screaming with the intensity of the pain. The healing ichor quickly surrounded the damage on his back and the bones and skin began knitting. Slowly, he got to his feet. Above him he could hear the crowd cheering for him. He raised his hand to the air to show he was alright but just as quickly brought it down as he winced in excruciating pain. Again, he could feel the ichor flow, healing what felt like an internal injury, then again and again.

He looked up into the air, and his eyes grew with horror.

"Where's the other Bludger? Fred, George, where is the other Bludger?" Katie was growing steadily more frantic. Esdras was struggling to get onto his broom. His movements were slow and painful.

The twins turned to each other and brought their heads together to talk without Katie overhearing. "Fred, tell me you saw the Bludger bounce away. Tell me you saw it ricochet under the grandstand."

The other twin shook his head. "I followed Goyle all the way down. He hit, and it struck. All I saw was it hit, and then it disappeared in a silver glow."

They were pulled away from their discussion by the hair and quickly turned to face the fiery eyes of their companion. She was nearly hysterical. "WHERE IS THE OTHER BLUDGER?"

Fred cleared his throat as best he could. "We think...it's inside him."

Hermione nudged Ron. "Where did the other Bludger go?"

Any response from Ron never came as he was forcefully pulled back and replaced by Katie Bell. The look in her eye indicated that Hermione would be suitably dealt with for not obeying any command, and her voice was cool as ice. "Hermione, I need you to use the Dementor Medical Reference and find a way to find out what's going on inside of Esdras. Now."

Hermione nodded and fumbled for her book bag, keeping her eyes on the volatile chaser. She finally managed to get the book open and in her lap, and she began searching through the index. "There's the standard Dementor triage spell, but we have to be within five feet to cast it."

The ice in her voice grew even colder. "Does it look like we're within five feet of Esdras?"

The younger witch shook her head so violently that her hair tossed about wildly. Returning her attention to the book she came up with another option. "There's a spell that Azkaban doctors used to monitor troop health during battles during their last civil war."

Katie nodded. "That'll do. Cast it."

"I can't. You'll have to. It's in Azkabaaner."

The book was ripped from her lap as Katie began to read it. She placed a piece of parchment on the bench and began to read the incantation. She came to the last line and stopped. "I need to know the type of house Esdras is in. What does that mean?"

Hermione answered quickly. "There are three types of houses, major, minor and royal; each has a classifier that goes before the house name. Try using corvades."

Katie read the last line of the spell using his classifier and full name, Esdras Tarsus corvades Demnin, and watched as the parchment sprung to life. She cast an enlarging charm and fell back in shock when she saw what it displayed.

The parchment presented a scale representation of a Dementor, the caption below it read Esdras' name. The chest cavity was glowing an angry red alternating with flashes of silver as a small black ball bounced randomly inside. Beside that was a vertical silver bar, presently resting just below the number fifty five and steadily decreasing. The rest of the paper was filled with columns that cycled through lines of printed Azkabaaner at a very fast rate.

She set to work analyzing the parchment, looking up occasionally to view the action on the field. Esdras was putting far too much weight on the broom for a Dementor. She looked to the columns on the right side of the paper and gasped. "Here, this column is injuries. Superior dorsal and ventral float bladders are shattered; his lungs, diaphragm, trachea, esophagus, and heart are destroyed. Hermione, how long can he last without blood flow?"

The answer came immediately. "A month, give or take." She stood beside Katie and scrutinized the silver bar next. "This is his ichor remaining. He's healing the major injuries as they come. Damage this severe causes reflexive healing, he can't stop it but it will start to slow down as he approaches zero. He's going to start passively feeding when it drops below fifty percent, but he's got spells on his robes. He won't be able to feed, it'll keep dropping. Pray it doesn't hit zero."

"Then what will happen? Will he die?"

Hermione nodded grimly. "And he'll take out half the pitch when he goes."

On the pitch, Esdras disengaged his animagus form to conserve energy. He leaned against his broomstick and accelerated into the air

before flipping himself upside down and docking onto Cho's broom from below, moving with her as she flew through the air. The seeker looked down for a second. "You look like hell, Demnin."

He smirked. "I feel like hell, Chang. That Bludger from Goyle hit me right as I was beginning to heal. It healed inside of me. I can't feed and I don't have my stasis cloak with me. If I don't get this ball out before I deplete my ichor reserve, my supersolenoid will implode."

Cho glanced down and accelerated into the mess. Esdras struck the remaining Bludger as it approached them and unseated Montague from his broom. After a moment, she pulled back up with a scowl on her face. "The Bludger is inside you? And what's a supersolenoid?"

Esdras winced as the Bludger destroyed a freshly healed lung. "It's my energy to matter conversion organ. If it completely runs dry, it will collapse in on itself. It will kill me and probably destroy most of the pitch in the process, and everyone else along with it."

Her eyes widened as she looked down at the Dementor, then slightly behind him. "Then find a way to get Malfoy off my tail, the Snitch is right below us. How much time do we have?"

He looked back at the trailing form of Draco Malfoy, whose grin gave away his guilt. "Long enough."

The entire Gryffindor grandstand was now torn between watching the game and the parchment display. The silver bar dipped below the number twenty.

The Dementor abandoned his broom and twisted quickly as Cho made a steep dive; he came to rest behind her, sitting back to back. Malfoy entered the dive with them, his Nimbus 2001 quickly closing the gap between them. Esdras waited.

Cho called out from behind him. "We're almost there. Keep him off me."

From the folds of his cloak, the Dementor drew his wand, and carefully reaching behind him, he placed the tip against his back.

Malfoy was now no more than ten feet away. When the blonde had closed to arms reach, Esdras reached up with his free hand and pulled his hood back.

Malfoy's eyes bugged out and he let out a startled scream at the sight of the grey face. Esdras looked him in the eye as he whispered his spell. "Reducto!"

The crowd would later say that it had all transpired in slow motion. The Reductor curse tore through Esdras' chest, exploding his ribs outward. The Bludger, and a good amount of black blood and silver ichor, flew out, striking Draco Malfoy in the chest, knocking him from his broom. Cho swooped down and caught the Snitch before pulling up, but Esdras didn't follow. He fell heavily from the back of the broom, landing with a sickening crunch on the grass below. The crowd would later say that Katie Bell's scream brought time back to normal.

Chapter 11 – Ice and Fire

“Multiple skull fractures, fractured and dislocated mandible, fourteen ribs, sternum, ten vertebrae, humerus, radius, ulna, pelvis, and femur all broken or disintegrated. Over six inches of spinal cord, lungs, heart, diaphragm, esophagus, trachea, and all four superior float bladders completely obliterated. Severe swelling of the brain indicative of massive trauma. Plus he sustained almost complete blood loss, nearly all eight liters. Eight hours ago, the triage spell measured only seven percent in his ichor reserves. Now he’s up to sixty three percent and stopped passive feeding, so I’ve taken him out of isolation. He still hasn’t regained consciousness yet, but he’s healing. I imagine he’ll be awake by tomorrow morning at the latest, and he’ll be hungry.”

Madame Pomfrey smiled and looked at her patient, who was resting in front of her and filling the room with calm, rasping breaths despite his lack of lungs. Dumbledore stood to her right, shaking his head slowly. “Such amazing creatures, these Dementors. Why was the damage localized only to the upper chest? That Bludger should have done more than that.”

Pomfrey smirked and opened her copy of the Dementor Medical Reference. “I had the same question as well. Like you said, these Dementors are amazing creatures. Their stomachs are almost equal to unicorn horn in terms of hardness and strength. It’s an adaptation to allow them to eat virtually anything and it also helps protect the supersolenoid from injuries.”

The headmaster made a sound of approval and nodded. “And Mister Malfoy?”

“Oh, he was fine once I cleaned the blood off of him. Just a broken arm. I’ve already released him. I gave him something to help him sleep, but he’ll probably still have nightmares about seeing that face.” She inclined her head towards the hooded face of the Dementor.

Dumbledore nodded and looked down to the next bed. “And what of Mister Goyle?”

Pomfrey walked down the aisle to stand in front of the Slytherin beater's bed. "I'm afraid Miss Bell did quite a number on him. I've had to sedate him for the moment. It'll take most of the night to straighten out the curses she used. And then there's the concussion. The swelling on the black eye should go down shortly, but all I can do is put an ice pack on where she kicked him..."

Headmaster Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, like any man, magical or Muggle, winced in sympathy.

Katie stepped out of Professor McGonagall's office and sighed heavily, leaning against the stone wall next to it. The loss of fifty house points could be easily compensated for by Hermione, but the detention with Professor Snape would be far worse. At least it would give her something to occupy herself with while Esdras was healing.

She pried herself away from the wall and walked slowly down the corridor to the stairwell. Waiting for the stairs seemed almost laughable now, she had gotten so used to floating up and down with Esdras. Finally, the staircase arrived and she made her way down to the Great Hall for dinner.

The applause and cheers that greeted her came almost exclusively from the Ravenclaw table. Chambers, the chaser, came up to her and shook her hand. "I've seen you dish out a lot of hurt on the pitch, but what you did to Goyle was amazing. Remind me to stay on your good side."

She smiled weakly at him and nodded. Chambers had now been joined by Cho, who smiled softly at her. "He'll be fine. He's a Dementor, you know."

Katie nodded and looked grateful. "I know, but it still doesn't make this any easier. I doubt I'll get any rest until he's out of the Hospital Wing."

Cho nodded and patted her on her shoulder before dragging Chambers away. Katie smiled after them and then walked to the Gryffindor table, taking a seat between Fred and Hermione. Despite

her objections, the redhead began to put some chicken on her plate. "What did Cho have to say?"

"That Esdras would be alright. Of course he'll be alright." She smiled slightly. "Can I see Azkaban: A History for a minute?"

Hermione nodded and handed Katie the heavy text. The chaser opened the book and consulted the index before turning to the section on house types. She silently read the text:

There are three types of houses of Azkaban: major, minor, and royal. Each of these was assigned a classifier to be spoken before the name. For the minor houses, this name is vades. The major houses are called cordes. The royal house, to symbolize its unity with all other houses, has a contraction of the two names, corvades.

She closed the book and looked at it for a long while, her fears confirmed. With nothing else to do, she took the parchment display from her pocket and opened it on the table beside her plate. The amount of red on the Dementor figure had decreased dramatically; shades of yellow now permeated the head and chest cavity where the major injuries were being dealt with first. "He still doesn't have a heartbeat, though."

Hermione turned to take the book back from her and looked at the parchment. "He probably does and you just haven't seen it. Dementor pulses are measured in beats per hour."

Katie looked up from the parchment. "What's a normal pulse, then?"

"About one beat per hour."

Fred leaned around Katie and looked from the parchment to Hermione. "You're kidding me. One beat an hour to circulate blood over a nine foot tall creature with a metabolism one thousand times that of a hummingbird?"

Hermione looked to the redhead in shock. "How did you know about that?"

Fred shrugged and smiled. "You fell asleep with the Dementor Medical Reference open the other night. I took the opportunity to read a few chapters. I have to know what I'll be up against, after all."

Beside him, a goblet shattered. Katie's voice was again as cold as ice as she regarded the pumpkin juice trickling over her hand. "And if you do anything with that knowledge, Fred, your mother will cry when she sees what I've done to you."

The smile on the redhead's face disappeared. "Katie, I didn't mean..."

She cut him off as she stood up. "I'm not hungry anymore. Besides, I have detention."

"That should do it, then." The early morning sunlight streamed through the windows as Professor Lupin tucked his wand back into his robes and the final silver strands of his Patronus disappeared. He stepped back while Madame Pomfrey cast the triage spell over Esdras, who was now floating at normal float height.

The nurse nodded as the results came in. "Ichor reserves at ninety seven percent, no sign of any brain damage, all major organs repaired but functioning at minimal levels, and bone structure and musculature is still in repair. Pulse is holding steady at three quarters of a beat per hour, which is perfectly normal for an athlete of his caliber." She sighed and consulted the Medical Reference again. "According to this, were he in an Azkaban hospital, they'd release him and restrict him to light duty for a week while the rest of the damage heals. His supersolenoid will continue healing him, so he won't be getting any worse."

The professor nodded and scratched his head slightly. "So why isn't he awake then?"

The nurse smiled and shook her patient slightly. "A healing sleep is often difficult for a Dementor to wake up from." She shook the Dementor again. "Wake up, Esdras. It's time to check out."

The Dementor groaned and rolled over, floating gently off the side of the bed and bouncing a foot off the ground before righting himself and groaning again. "I feel like I got hit by the Knight Bus."

The professor and nurse helped him to a hover and guided him towards the door. Pomfrey smiled kindly at him. "Go on then, it's almost breakfast time. I imagine people will be anxious to see you up and about. I practically had to throw your team, your house, Katie, and a handful of others out of here yesterday evening." She put a hand on his and looked into his hood. "And for Merlin's sake, take it easy. Your skeletal system and superior float bladders are still healing so stay off your feet and make sure to rely on your inferior float bladders to move about. Since they are below your stomach, they're still fully functional."

The Dementor nodded and took to his mortal form, pulling the hood back from his head and smiling before giving the nurse a hug. "Yes, ma'am. Thank you for everything. You did a wonderful job, I feel great."

Madame Pomfrey smiled kindly at him and Esdras took to the air and flew silently down the hall and up the stairs to the Ravenclaw dorms. He desperately needed a shower and was keen on avoiding as many people as possible until that time, his Quidditch robes and cloak still bore the holes from the Reductor curse and the whole ensemble stank of stale blood and ichor.

The suit of armor guarding the door to the Ravenclaw common room stated it best. "My God, man, you look like a war zone."

The Dementor smiled ironically at the suit and muttered the password. "Blacksmith."

The armor nodded and stepped aside, holding the door open. He called out into the room. "Hail, the conquering hero comes!"

Cuffing the armor gently on the back of the helmet, Esdras walked into the common room to the applause of the few people up early enough for his entrance. Cho hopped up from the couch and nearly tackled him as he crossed the room. "Esdras! You're awake! It took you long enough."

He smiled softly and hugged her back. "Yes, well, do you know how hard it is to regenerate a heart? It's not exactly easy." He looked around the room a bit. "What did I miss while I was out?"

Cho gave him the quick story. "We won, 310-100. Katie got a detention with Snape for knocking Goyle out and kicking him where it counts when he was down. Otherwise, we've all been sitting around, doing homework, and waiting for you to wake up."

The Dementor gave a low whistle. "We did a good job." He looked down at himself again. "I'm going to grab a shower and then try to find Katie. If I know her, she's probably none too pleased with me."

An icy cold shower, a fresh set of robes, and a clean cloak made Esdras feel like a new Dementor. He floated cheerfully down the hall and hopped the banister down into the stairwell, freefalling to the ground floor below. By now, all of Ravenclaw was awake and at breakfast, leading to a standing ovation as he entered the Great Hall. He responded with a wave and a bow and turned from his table to walk towards the Gryffindor table.

He was not surprised to see that Katie didn't even acknowledge his approach. She didn't even look up. She just spoke a single sentence into her plate. "We need to talk, Esdras Tarsus corvades Demnin."

If the Dementor heart beat anything like a mortal heart, the mention of his classifier would have stopped him. As it was, he was merely left speechless. "How did you find out?" His eyes shot up, glowing bright green across the table to the equally silent form on the other side. "Hermione..."

Katie silenced him with her sharp words. "You leave her out of this. Now go eat your breakfast. I'll meet you by the lake in an hour."

Esdras opened and closed his mouth a few times before rising into the air. "Yes, my dear."

Once he had floated away, Hermione looked up and sighed softly. "Katie, don't you think you were a little harsh on him? I mean, he

probably has his reasons for not telling you. How would you like everyone to know if it was your family?"

The elder girl calmly regarded the younger girl and smiled sadly. "Hermione, it's all about trust. Every day, I put my trust in him that he'll be the same old wonderful Esdras and not have my soul for a midday snack, no matter what face he wears. I just want him to put some trust in me."

An hour later found Esdras gliding silently over the lake, making small trails of ice by floating close to the water. He returned to the shore when he noticed Katie approaching. The two met on the shore and Esdras looked deeply into her eyes, trying to get some idea of what he was in for.

He was surprised when she leaned into his chest and wrapped her arms around him. "You should have told me. I would have understood."

Esdras sighed and held her tight. "It's not something I've ever given much thought about. Any real meaning behind it was stripped away by the Treaty of Edinburgh. The only remaining sign is that classifier."

Katie leaned back and looked up into his eyes. "But you are still royalty!"

Esdras rolled his eyes. "Yes, yes, I know." He sighed heavily and put on an air of false importance. "His Majesty Esdras Tarsus of the royal house of Demnin, bearer of the Glaive of Silence and true king of all Dementors, leader of the Azkaban Commonwealth, and commander of all Dementor military forces. But I am no king. Here and now, I am simply Esdras Demnin, and you are Katie Elizabeth mashavades Bell."

With her language training, the determination of the classifier was easy. "Katie Elizabeth of the mortal house of Bell?" At his smile and nod, Katie balanced up on her tiptoes and gave him a lingering kiss. Esdras gladly returned it until she just as quickly broke it off, poking him in the stomach. "Just don't think you can go hiding anything else like this from me again."

Esdras made to assuage her, but she playfully jabbed him again. This time tickling him and causing him to slip on the wet rocks by the lake and fall backwards. Before he could catch himself in a float or she could catch him, he had fallen backwards, his left arm flailing into the lake. As quickly as he was in, he was out, hovering over the surface and cradling his arm to his body.

Katie pulled him back from the water by the cloak and looked sheepish. "I'm sorry, dear. Are you alright? Let me see." She gasped when Esdras turned to face her, a six inch thick coating of ice surrounding his lower arm. "What happened?"

Esdras smiled weakly. "We don't have a problem with falling water. Rain is fine; it turns to ice before it touches us. It makes showering difficult, but there are spells to help." He gestured to his ice sheathed arm. "Bodies of water are a problem for us though."

The mortal got on the Dementor's right side and hurried him back up towards the castle. "Let's get you back to Madame Pomfrey, then."

Esdras shook his head. "No, we don't have to bother her. She's done so much already. Just get me to a fireplace; I can melt this off myself."

Katie nodded as they entered the castle. She latched her arms around his neck and they floated slowly up the stairwell. She stopped him at the seventh floor and turned him down an unfamiliar hallway. "Come on, I caused this and I'll take care of it." She stopped at a painting of a knight on horseback. "Hollyhock."

The knight regarded the floating Esdras with distrust. "Visitors aren't permitted, Miss Bell. You know the rules. He shall have to duel me and win to gain entry!"

Katie sighed and turned to Esdras. "Ever since Sirius Black attacked, we've had to put up with this git. I've never missed the Fat Lady so much." She flipped the sleeve of Esdras' cloak back, revealing the ice cast. "Please, just this once. It's an emergency." She struggled for another reason. "Besides, isn't it ungallant to not provide aid to the stricken?"

The knight sighed and slowly opened up to reveal the portrait hole. "Well put, my lady, well put. But none of this was my fault if you get caught."

Esdras followed Katie into the hole and came out on the other side in a room decorated in warm maroon and gold. Seated around the large fireplace were the four Weasleys, Harry, and Hermione. The Dementor took to his feet and followed behind Katie. "I seem to be running into you guys where ever I go."

Hermione took one look at his arm and glared at Katie. "You pushed him in the water? I thought you weren't angry at him. Did you even know what water could do to him? He's still injured!"

Stepping between the seated girl and his standing girlfriend, Esdras put on his best charming smile. "Ladies, ladies, please. No harm done. Look, I'll be good as new in a bit." He cast a quick fireproofing charm on his cloak and robes and then stuck his arm into the fire, lying down next to the hearth as the fire began the fight to melt the ice. He looked around and zeroed in on the only unfamiliar face. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure yet. I'm Esdras."

The redheaded girl smiled shyly, hiding behind her hair. "Ginny."

The Dementor nodded, taking note of her hair. "Ginny Weasley, no doubt?"

To the surprise of all gathered, Ginny replied in perfect Azkabaaner. "*Yes, Ginny of the mortal house of Weasley.*" At the amazed looks from her family and friends, she quickly continued. "Katie left Azkabaaner for Causal Conversations out one day, I don't know much more than pleasantries and introductions."

The Dementor smirked, pulling his ice free and slightly charred arm from the flame. The silvery glow of ichor covered the flesh and departed just as quickly to reveal it as good as new. "Well, at this rate, half the school will be speaking it."

Chapter 12 – Gryffindor vs. Hufflepuff

Esdras stood before the partially opened doors to the Entrance Hall, staring out into maw of the steadily growing storm. After a time, he was joined by a smaller figure with raven hair. The Dementor frowned. “I believe it’s getting worse.”

Cho nodded. “I think you’re right. I’m slightly concerned for the game this afternoon, maybe they’ll cancel it.” A quick look up revealed that her friend didn’t hold the same belief. “How about your troops, are they equipped to handle this weather?”

It was no surprise that news of his species’ inherent weakness to standing water had passed through the school’s regular gossip channels. The Dementor nodded and moved to close the heavy door. “They’ll manage fine. Most likely, they’re hunkered down in the camp we built by the lake. Not even Sirius Black would make a move in this weather. So they’ll most likely be holed up underground, playing cards probably. Any idea what’s for breakfast?”

The pair turned to move towards the Great Hall and their waiting breakfast. Cho shook her head in response. “No clue, hopefully something warm.”

The Dementor nodded. As they took their seats, they discovered the breakfast waiting for them was oatmeal. Esdras took one of the many large bowls and began to work on it by himself. It wasn’t long before a pair of delicate arms wrapped around his waist and a silky voice whispered in his ear. “Are you going to cheer for me this afternoon?”

Leaning back into the embrace, Esdras smiled and hooked his arms around the form behind him. “Hmmm, I don’t really know. I mean, I do have a potions essay to write. I may have to skip the game.”

Katie playfully cuffed him across the back of the head. “You’d better find some time in your busy schedule to watch your girlfriend play Quidditch.” She paused dramatically. “Especially in this weather, because if I’m going to die of pneumonia, I want my boyfriend to see how great I was.”

Esdras looked up, catching her warm chocolate eyes with his fluorescent green eyes and smiled. "Of course I'll be there. But with the weather the way it is, I'd rather you weren't playing today."

She looked confidently down at him. "Please, this is nothing. Besides, it'll probably break before the match, anyway."

Shaking his head softly, Esdras laughed. "Katie, I've lived on a small island in the North Sea for over three hundred years. I know storms. This one is nowhere near finished. But, don't you worry about that, if you can date a Dementor, you can handle a storm."

Katie leaned down and softly captured his lips. "You bet I can."

Esdras smiled. "How is the replacement gatekeeper holding up?"

Katie huffed loudly and ran a hand through her hair. "Sir Cadogan? He is still irritating to no end. And he tried to recite poetry to me the other day. He wouldn't hear that I had a boyfriend. But, he's getting the job done. Anyway, I need breakfast." With another quick kiss and a smile to the other Quidditch players at the table, she turned and walked away.

As she left, Esdras' eyes followed after her. The others could tell he was deep in thought. When he turned back to the table, he had a resolute look to his eyes. Cho looked at him curiously. "Well, out with it."

The Dementor smirked, and started searching through his pockets. "Well, I was just thinking, Dementors have a few thousand years worth of knowledge in the field of warming and water impermeability charms. I really ought to put them to use, shouldn't I?"

Cho smiled brightly and leaned in to conspire with him. "Charm her Quidditch robes? How are you going to do that? You'll have to get into the Gryffindor dorms. You can't do that without the password."

Esdras smirked. He dropped a silver badge with Azkabanner script on it. It portrayed an imposing island castle surmounted by a vulture in flight. In the vulture's feet were the two halves of a broken wand. "I think I have a way around that."

Roger did a double take as he looked at the silver object. "Is that an Azkaban Guard badge?"

The knight in the painting drew his sword and pointed it at the approaching figure. "Halt! Who goes there? Be ye friend or foe?"

Esdras stood in his natural form, nine feet tall and cloaked black as night. He said nothing for a long while, but finally spoke with his mortal voice. "I am friend. I demand entrance."

Sir Cadogan reigned in his horse, which had quickly gone skittish at the appearance of the sepulchral visitor. "You again? Provide the password, or prepare to fight."

The guard captain approached the painting even closer, ignoring the frightened whinnies of the horse. He produced the shining silver badge from within his cloak and pressed it to the canvas of the painting. "This is my password, the badge of the Azkaban Guard. You require nothing more, and you will report nothing. Are we in understanding?"

As close as he was, Cadogan could see beneath the hood. His voice promptly left him and he merely nodded, his helmet rattling violently before the painting pulled away to reveal the portrait hole.

The Dementor laughed to himself as he floated quietly through the open portal. He quickly rose up to the roof and looked around, the room was deserted. It made sense; everyone would still be at breakfast, then going to class. If all went according to plan, he would be a few minutes late to History of Magic at most. Katie would never suspect a thing.

He floated slowly up one stairwell and peered in a door. The messiness of the room indicated he had picked the wrong set of dorms. He floated slowly up the other stairwell. By never touching the ground, he never activated any of the security devices contained within the stairwell. He looked into the first door he came to, and the shades of pink and floral scents nearly overpowered him.

Coughing slightly, the Dementor continued floating along, peering into open doors until he came to the one marked for fourth years. Floating slowly into that room, he looked at each one of the beds. The one in the corner had a picture of Katie grinning with her parents beside the engine of the Hogwarts Express. Esdras smirked as he looked at the neatly made bed. Katie had already laid her Quidditch robes out in preparation for the game. The Dementor drew his wand and began to cast the first of many spells.

Fifteen minutes later, Esdras was satisfied that nothing short of a tsunami would get into her Quidditch robes. Silently as always, he floated back into the stairwell and down into the common room. Right as he reached the portrait hole, he heard the portrait begin to swing open. Lacking options, the Dementor retreated to the ceiling, tucking himself into the corner and trying to appear like a shadow.

To his relief, Hermione entered the room at a near dead run and rushed to a table near the window to toss one of the many books that littered the surface into her bag. He would be safe if she turned left and continued out of the room.

Hermione turned right.

The black shadow in the corner of the normally bright and cheerful room caught her attention. Moving closer to it, she could notice it was breathing. She raised her wand and called out. "Esdras?"

The Dementor grumbled and floated slowly out of the corner, transforming to mortal form and raising his arms in the air. "Don't shoot, I'll come peacefully."

The witch sighed in relief and put her wand away before looking curiously at him. "What are you doing in our common room again? How did you get in here?"

Esdras ran a hand through his blonde hair and sighed. "Look, don't tell Katie. I came in here to put some warming and water impermeability charms on her Quidditch robes. I wanted it to be a surprise. I flashed my guard badge to Cadogan, he didn't ask twice."

The young witch smiled and shook her head. "That is incredibly romantic, Esdras. I'm sure she'll appreciate it and I won't tell a soul. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll be late to Herbology as it is."

The Dementor smiled and walked with her as they exited the portrait hole. "Here, I'll give you a lift. I owe you." He put an arm behind her shoulders and swept her off her feet with the other before lifting a few feet in the air.

The girl let out a startled squeak before grasping tightly around Esdras' neck. He heard her plaintively call out as he wrapped her into his cloak for their impending trip to the rain soaked greenhouses. "Really, it's quite alright. I'm not a fan of flying."

Esdras shrugged and kicked off the wall, propelling them quickly down the hall towards the stairwell. "Nah, it's fine so long as you don't look down."

He made a ninety degree turn down into the stairwell. Hermione's screams echoed down the marble halls long after the pair had passed out the front door.

"This is like some of the storms we get on Azkaban that blow in from the Arctic Ocean in winter." Esdras looked around in shock, his ice coated hair blowing violently in the wind. He raised his hood and started breaking the ice that had started to form on his face. His mark thirteen inhibitor cloak, while preventing mortals from feeling the cold and darkness that surrounded him, still did nothing to stop the rain from turning to ice around him. This prevented the cloak from freezing solid. If water got inside it, the garment would be useless, as last month's ice cast incident had proven.

Cho looked up miserably from beneath her own soaking wet cloak. "That's another plus for the Azkaban holiday guide. Come visit Azkaban. See our great arctic storms."

Most of Ravenclaw house had gathered around the Dementor. While it didn't abate the cold any, the ice was easier to deal with than the pervasive rain. Esdras was busily casting basic Dementor impermeability charms on his housemate's cloaks; he would get

around to casting the drying charms later for those who didn't know them already.

Britten had wrapped himself and his girlfriend Cecilia in a woolen blanket and looked over at the Dementor. "Esdras, are you worried...you know, about Katie in this weather?"

Esdras rolled his eyes, his voice full of sarcasm. "No, Ben, I'm perfectly fine about this. Not even Dementors feel comfortable flying in this kind of weather, so why should I feel uncomfortable about my mortal girlfriend flying in it?"

Roger turned to face them, from beneath a mass of soaked black cloak. "Really, Dementors don't like rain? I thought you could stand falling water."

Esdras nodded, raising his voice to be heard over the steadily increasing wind. "Falling water, yes. But falling water has a tendency to pool up, and then it becomes standing water. Plus, there's the wind. It's hard when you're being blown around in the wind. That's why we don't like big storms like this, better to stay underground in the caves where it's dry."

In the locker room, Oliver Wood looked out onto the pitch, or what he could see of it through the heavy rain. He turned to face his team. "Well, we'll get a little wet, but at least Hufflepuff will have the same trouble we have. Now I know they haven't been a real threat to us, but we shouldn't underestimate them. This is the kind of weather that levels the playing field. So let's get out there and play smart."

Gryffindor was called onto the field first, and the cheers from the grandstands mixed with the rain and wind, to produce nothing more than a muffled roar. As Katie kicked off the floor and passed through the open door into the maelstrom, she expected to be instantly drenched, but found herself warm and dry. A closer inspection of her robes showed that the water was, in fact, beading on the woolen material.

Alicia hovered close to her, shouting to be heard over the wind. "What's wrong?"

Katie looked up and shouted in turn. "My robes, they're dry. Esdras must have charmed them!"

Her fellow chaser flipped a lock of wet hair back over her head. "You're lucky, Bell."

By this time, Hufflepuff had taken the field as well. The two captains shook hands and took to the air. Katie was vaguely aware as the Bludgers bolted from their box and Fred and George took after them. Her eyes were entirely on the Quaffle.

Esdras had started the match relying on both his mortal and Dementor sight, but as the storm continued unabated, he simply switched forms and gave up his mortal eyes. His Dementor eyes were unimpeded by the weather, and allowed him to see the glowing silver forms flying through the air. Holding his cobalt glasses over his ocular plane allowed him to see the Bludgers and Quaffle as well.

The rest of Ravenclaw sat around Esdras, trying to keep as dry and as warm as possible, and listening to his commentary, which was better than Lee's constant attempts at guessing the action, if less dramatic. "Quaffle to Spinnet, now Johnson, and now Spinnet again, pass to Katie. Gryffindor scores."

Cho leaned closer. "What does that make the score now?"

The Dementor shrugged. "I have no idea. I'd have to be closer to the scoreboard to see the numbers."

She huffed slightly. "Well what about Harry and Cedric? Where's the Snitch?"

Esdras looked around for a bit. "Harry is higher up than Cedric. They're both looking for the Snitch. Neither of them are even pointed towards it, though. It's behind them, near the Slytherin grandstand." He threw his hands up in the air. "Now he's going higher. What's wrong with him?"

He let out a sigh and followed the Gryffindor seeker higher. Then, he tensed as his hood shot quickly to the left and the right. Cho quickly picked up on the change. "What is it?"

Esdras rose silently into the air and let out a low growl. "Marines."

Harry was now in flight for his life. The Dementors on his tail continued to gain and the screams in his head were growing louder. Around him the cold, icy darkness grew. With his last bit of strength, he attempted to level out his broom, but failed. As he toppled off the side of the Nimbus 2000, the last thing he saw before the darkness took over was a lone Dementor sweeping past him through the air, gripping a long platinum weapon.

Esdras had to ignore Harry. The mortal would be able to survive the fall, but the Dementor captain had an obligation to clear his subordinates from the Quidditch pitch, provided he didn't kill them all first for the blatant disregard of his orders. He angrily addressed his troops over the roaring wind. *"You are in restricted airspace and in disregard of direct orders given by your commanding officer. Return to the command bunker immediately or offer prayers to the gods before your death."*

A majority of the Dementor Marines took one look at the Glaive in his hand and quickly turned tail and flew back towards the command bunker. One of the Dementors closest to him swayed slightly in midair and laughed at his face. *"Come on, captain. We're just having some fun. You need to relax a little."*

Esdras recognized the voice of Captain Sanguis and the brim of his hood lowered in anger. *"Tarquin, you are expected to set an example for your men. If you cannot do that, I will relieve you of command."* He leveled the blade of the Glaive at him. *"Now return to the bunker or face your death."*

The subordinate captain shook his head sadly. *"You don't actually believe the legends, do you, captain? We are immortal! No weapon can kill us, let alone some stupid blade."*

Esdras regarded Tarquin for a second before turning his attention to the blade. Gripping it low on the handle, he drew back and swung. The platinum blade cut easily through Sanguis' cloak, and the captain himself, with the blade exiting in a spray of black and silver.

Sanguis tried to keep himself in the air, but with two severed superior float bladders, he could only slow his fall as he fell from the sky, followed by the bladed Dementor. He struck the ground and bounced hard. Esdras landed above him, floating menacingly over his broken form. *"Captain Tarquin Quintus vades Sanguis, you are charged with disobeying a commanding officer, insubordination, and reckless endangerment of subordinates and mortals. How plead ye?"*

Tarquin could only watch as the blade rose over him. Despite the darkness, cold, rain, and ice, it still gleamed with a hypnotic shine of its own. *"I plead guilty, and beg for mercy, my lord."*

Esdras shook his head slowly. *"Mercy is not the domain of the god of death. Be one with your ancestors."*

Captain Sanguis turned his head to avoid seeing the final strike that would shatter his supersolenoid. When it did not come, he looked up to see the Glaive of Silence stayed by the hand of a mortal girl. She looked calmly into the captain's hood, and even though he couldn't understand her words, he could tell she addressed him as an equal in soft, loving tones. *"Esdras, it's alright. It's not worth it."*

To his surprise and relief, the blade lowered slowly. Captain Demnin turned to address his fallen subordinate. *"You are hereby relieved of command. As of this moment, I personally take direct control of all Marine forces in the Hogsmeade region. Your life is spared. Leave before I change my mind. Heal your wounds at the command bunker. I will join you there shortly."*

Tarquin did not ask questions. He had already stopped bleeding, and relied on his inferior float bladders to take to the sky, ignoring the painful slash across his chest. He made his way slowly towards the lake. Looking back at the Quidditch pitch, he gasped to see the captain take the mortal girl into his arms and hold her close.

Esdras paused outside of the infirmary to double check that he had everything: quill, ink, situation report forms, and a writing tablet. When he was sure he had everything he straightened out his uniform cloak and entered the room. He was pleased to see that Harry was up, but sickened by the sight of his shattered broom.

He paused outside of the circle of Gryffindor Quidditch players, intending to give them room but was dragged into the circle when Katie latched herself to his side, leaning heavily into his shoulder. Despite his situation, he tried his best to perform his duty. "Harry James Potter, I am captain Esdras Tarsus corvades Demnin, commander of the Thirteenth Dementor Infantry and commander of operations for the Hogsmeade region. I would like to take your statement regarding events that occurred this day at seventeen hundred thirty six hours." He softened slightly. "I know it's soon, but I'd like to get this done while it's still fresh in your memory."

Harry nodded and watched as Esdras placed the tablet on the table, the quill standing at attention and ready to record. He began slowly. "I was playing Quidditch at the time; I'm the Gryffindor team seeker. I had gone up high in order to look for the Snitch when the air around me grew cold and the rain turned to ice. Looking around, I was surrounded by Dementors. I dived back towards the pitch, but they followed me. As they neared me, I began to grow weak and heard my mother screaming before Voldemort killed her. Then, I passed out."

Esdras nodded and looked at the tablet again. "Thank you, Harry. I'm just going to strike out the part about your mother screaming and we'll keep it." He smiled lightly. "No one needs to know what you hear around us."

Harry nodded as Esdras continued filling out the forms. "What will happen to them?"

The Dementor looked to his tablet for a moment before meeting Harry's eyes. "I honestly haven't decided yet. I know that they'll all be demoted and all three divisions will be reassigned. I had warned the guard command that this sort of thing would happen, so hopefully this time they'll listen to me when assigning personnel." He indicated the

broken broom. "If you want, I can order a special dispensation to compensate you for damages caused."

Harry shrugged and sighed, regarding the splintered remains of his broomstick. "Whatever. It won't make a difference one way or the other."

Esdras nodded and stood up slowly. "Well, I have to get going. I'll be taking the Seventh and Eighth Marines with me and leaving the Twelfth here until I come back. Then they'll return to the island."

Katie leaned gently against him. "Where are you going?"

"Azkaban. Hopefully I'll return with troops more suited to routine patrol."

She rested her blonde head against his shoulder again. "How long will you be gone?"

Esdras shrugged. "That depends on how quickly I can cut through the red tape. I'm going to try to be back here by tomorrow morning with at least three infantry divisions. It's going to be a long night of paperwork."

Chapter 13 – Second Hogsmeade

Esdras had been good to his word. The students taking Herbology that next morning had spoken of the impressive sight of four ranks of Dementors floating over the castle and towards the lake. For Esdras, however, the work only continued as he had to balance school work, Quidditch, settling in four infantry divisions, assigning duty schedules, and arranging for the energy requirements of an extra division.

However, the good news was that he was again in command of his infantry division. The entire Thirteenth Infantry, thirty Dementors strong with their commander included, stood at attention before the main gate of Hogwarts castle. Esdras stood in front of them during lunch that day, Katie at his side as he inspected them. “Commander Reaping, you’ve let these troops slip.”

Katie nudged him in the side. “They understand English?”

Esdras nodded silently as the cloaked figure in the middle stepped forward to address him. “I must disagree, sir. You’ve been too long from a proper unit that you are having difficulty remembering what one looks like.”

Peals of Dementor laughter echoed across the lawn as Esdras stepped forward and grabbed his executive officer in a back slapping hug. “Aaron, everyone, it’s good to have you around again.” He indicated for Katie to step up beside him. “This is Katie Bell. We’ve been seeing each other for a little over a month now.”

The Dementors floated around her and inspected her from every angle. They had been outfitted with mark thirteen cloaks, so Katie just stood still, observing her observers with a curious expression. Finally a voice piped up from one of the Dementors to her right. “Well, she looks nice for a mortal, but isn’t she a bit young?”

Esdras rolled his eyes. “Katie, meet Lieutenant Commander Malachi DeCay, our resident jokester.”

The Dementor bowed. “The pleasure is mine.”

The captain smirked and looked fondly to his friends. "I'm glad to have you all here; you'll make my job a lot easier. I'm going to be relying heavily on you all for intermediate command decisions. As the mortals say, you'll be my eyes and ears while I'm in the castle. As such, Commander, you have been granted permission to enter the castle for the purpose of making reports to me. I've put my reputation on the line with Dumbledore, so I trust you not to take advantage of this."

The commander shook his head. "The thought never crossed my mind, sir."

Smiling, Esdras nodded and stepped back. "Alright then, you've got responsibilities to take care of. I'll stop by after dinner tonight and we can catch up. Dismissed."

As the Dementor division floated off to make their patrols, Esdras and Katie turned to walk back up to the castle. Katie smiled and took his arm. "They seem like a very nice bunch."

He nodded. "They are. I've worked with them for half a century now, and they're like family. Especially Aaron, he's like a brother to me, his sister and children are even my godchildren."

At the castle steps, Esdras paused and looked back to the receding forms of his friends. Katie took his hand and tugged him into the warmth of the castle. "Come on, let's get lunch."

The days continued to grow shorter as the second Hogsmeade visit approached. On that day, the whole school was pleased to wake up to bright white snow covering the ground and falling from the sky. As the students walked downstairs for breakfast, Esdras took the opportunity to pull Filch aside and hand him the signed permission form that his division, with no shortage of laughter, had brought him.

Esdras had finished his breakfast quickly and was presently floating around the chandelier in the Entrance Hall, waiting for Katie to come downstairs. While his species didn't really need cold weather gear, the Dementor was still wearing a navy blue woolen knit cap with a white pom-pom on top and dragon hide gloves with his winter cloak.

Finally he caught sight of Katie and floated to meet her halfway up the stairs. "Ready to go?"

Katie nodded and, once they reached the base of the stairs, stood on her tiptoes to kiss him before moving to join the line. A soft smile played about her face. "Esdras, what are your plans for the Christmas holiday?"

The Dementor scratched his head through his woolen cap and sighed. "Well, Harry is staying here, so if I'm not recalled to the island, I'll most likely stick around. Why do you ask?"

Katie shrugged. "I got a letter from home today. I had told my parents about us and they had said that if I wanted to bring you home for Christmas that I could. And I'd really like it if you could come."

His eyes widened as they were checked off by Filch and walked out into the snow. "Well, I do have some holiday time. I could take a fortnight and leave command to Aaron or Malachi. I don't think they'd mind."

Katie flipped up her hood as they walked down the snow covered path to the front gate. "How much holiday time do you have? I don't want you to go through any trouble for me."

The Dementor smiled. "I don't think that will be a problem, dear. Azkaban guards get one month of holiday time every year with rollover. I presently have something close to ten years of holiday time accrued."

Katie's eyes grew wide. "Well, you should talk to Aaron and Malachi, then."

They passed through the gate and the two snow covered Dementors standing guard snapped to attention. Esdras smirked and turned to the closest. "Putting some color in your wardrobe, Malachi?"

The Dementor shrugged and looked around at the falling snow. "Would you believe that this is actually camouflage, sir?"

Laughing, Esdras continued his way into town. "Excellent work, Commander. Oh, and would you tell Commander Reaping I'll need to speak with the two of you tonight. No rush."

The Dementor guard nodded and waved as they walked off towards town.

Hogsmeade took on even more charm when it snowed, if that was possible. The glass of the storefronts was frosted, making the warmth inside even more inviting. Esdras and Katie walked hand in hand down the snow covered street, window shopping until they found something that interested them. Their trip to Zonko's Joke Shop was eventful only because Esdras dropped an Exploding Snap deck, startling everyone within twenty feet.

With bags in hand, their next stop was Honeydukes, which drew in the Dementor with a very large display of mint crèmes in the window. He floated into the shop in a trance, Katie following alongside. It took them a while to make it to the counter, but Esdras was finally able to flag down a salesperson. "I'd like two Galleon's worth of the mint crèmes in the window."

The look of glee on his face as he received his bag of candy made Katie laugh. Looking around the store, she saw Hermione and Ron in the corner. This brought her thoughts to the missing part of the triumvirate. "I feel bad about Harry, we should get him something."

Esdras nodded and stuffed a mint crème in his mouth before holding the bag open for Katie. "What does he like?"

Katie shrugged, munching on her own mint crème. "Chocolate frogs, every flavor beans, I don't think there's much he doesn't like. Esdras, are you even listening to me?"

The green glow from his eyes was even more pronounced as he concentrated on Hermione and Ron from across the room. He squinted and the glow in his eyes disappeared. After a few seconds, his eyes regained their normal glowing hue. He looked to Katie and smiled. "I'm sorry, darling, I was listening. I'll go ask those two what they're getting him so we won't get the same thing."

She nodded happily and kissed him before turning to look at some of the display cases behind her. Esdras meanwhile threaded through the store to the glowing mortal forms in the corner of the store. Tapping Hermione on the shoulder, he was pleased to see her turn, jolt in surprise, and then cast her eyes to her seemingly vacant left flank before addressing him in nervous tones. "Esdras, w...what a pleasant surprise. How are you today?"

The Dementor smiled pleasantly, giving nothing away. "I'm fine, Hermione. How are you?" He turned to her companion. "Ron, how are you?"

The redhead gulped nervously. "Just fine, thank you."

Esdras nodded. "Good, glad to hear it. Anyway, Katie and I were going to get something for Harry since he's stuck back at the castle. We wanted to know what you were getting him so we wouldn't double gift."

The witch looked at him in confusion. "Well, umm...Ron and I were going to get Harry some...some..."

Ron chimed in helpfully. "Some licorice wands. Weren't we?"

Hermione nodded furiously. Esdras smirked. "Well, we'll get him some chocolate frogs then. But would you tell him something for me the next time you see him?" The pair nodded and Esdras leaned in, his voice quickly taking harsh Azkabaaner accents as he grabbed the pair by their shirt fronts. "Remind him that Dementors can see through invisibility cloaks and that if it were anyone else who saw him, they'd Kiss first and ask questions later. And tell him I want to see him when I get back to Hogwarts."

Esdras sharply turned his head to the right, staring at the empty space beside Hermione. With his Dementor vision, he could see the glowing silver form of a bespectacled mortal. He stared hard at the invisibility cloaked figure before smiling and turning to walk back to Katie. She smiled happily at him, a small bag of chocolate truffles in her hand. "What did they say?"

The Dementor looked back at the three figures rushing out the door. "They said we should get frogs."

Esdras had insisted on following Hermione, Ron, and the cloaked Harry towards the Three Broomsticks, claiming fatigue after a full morning and early afternoon on his feet, an impressive feat for a Dementor. So they sat and enjoyed a hot butterbeer for a while, relaxing and watching the other people come and go in the tavern.

The Dementor leaned forward and looked down into their mugs before slipping out of their booth. "Another one for you, darling?"

Katie nodded and passed her mug off to him before leaning back and staring out the window. Esdras turned and quickly floated through the crowd to the bar, obtaining two more mugs. On his way back, he was stopped by a booming voice. "Here's one of my top students now!"

A heavy, forceful pat on the back followed. It was only thanks to years of flight experience that Esdras was able to launch forward with the blow, fly across the tavern, spin in midair, kick off the wall, and fly back, all without spilling a drop of butterbeer. Turning quickly to face his assailant, his eyes glowed menacingly before relaxing and inclining his head to the occupants of the table. "Good afternoon Professor Hagrid, Professor McGonagall, Professor Flitwick, Minister Fudge."

The minister looked curiously to the cloaked student. "I'm sorry, have we met?"

Esdras blinked in disbelief before floating into the air and transforming for a second. He was human again before he drew unwanted attention. "Perhaps now you remember, Minister?"

Fudge smiled. "Oh yes, I remember you now. Commander Damnit, was it?"

The Dementor gritted his teeth, emphasizing each syllable slowly and precisely. "Captain Demnin, Minister."

The minister continued to smile. "Quite right, in fact, you may be just the person for this conversation. I was just telling the professors here about Sirius Black's crimes. You served as a guard at Azkaban while he was there, what are your thoughts about him?"

Esdras looked to the left of the table, where Hermione, Ron, and cloaked Harry sat with looks of shock and awe on their faces. "You were discussing Sirius Black within earshot of students, civilians, and the wizarding population in general?" At the minister's vacant nod, Esdras sighed and continued. "Sirius Black, Azkaban prisoner number chi psi three nine zero, captured by mortal auror forces on the sixty first day of Orinaldes, Treaty Year 1010. Began serving a life sentence for untried crimes against the wizarding world on the first day of Varaldes, Treaty Year 1010. A model inmate with a clean discipline record, psychological evaluations indicate him to be highly intelligent and motivated, even if brash and reckless. Black has never been considered a threat or a danger. We've always considered your fear of him to be unfounded at best, foolish at worst."

By this point, the cloaked form of Harry had bolted from the nearby table and ran quickly behind Esdras. Ron and Hermione followed suit, the latter having fallen behind to leave a few Sickles on the table. Esdras quickly placed his mugs on the table and spun, holding Hermione in place with one arm before she passed. He smiled with false cheerfulness. "Hermione, thank you again for finding that reference on Mandrake for me, it really helped." He leaned in and hugged her, whispering hurriedly in her ear. "Tell Harry I'll meet him before dinner in the library."

Hermione pulled away and looked into his glowing green eyes before nodding and smiling with equal false cheer. "Oh, it was no trouble, anytime at all." With a quick spin and a flip of her bushy hair, she was out the door.

The Dementor turned to face the table of professors again and took the mugs back into his hands. "If you'll excuse me, professors, minister, I believe I've kept Katie waiting long enough."

Cornelius Fudge sat and watched him walk away before turning to Professor McGonagall. "Who is Katie?"

Esdras had successfully deflected Katie's concern at his distraction for the remainder of the Hogsmeade trip by recounting the conversation with Minister Fudge. He had seen her to the Gryffindor portrait hole and left her with a kiss that left him floating, literally. Now, he was waiting outside the library for an entirely different Gryffindor.

Harry Potter turned the corner and saw the sharp blue accents of Esdras' Ravenclaw attire. The Dementor leaned casually against the wall and cast his glowing green eyes down the hall at the sound of approaching footsteps. He nodded slowly. "Harry."

Harry nodded in return. "Esdras."

Esdras turned and kept walking down towards the end of the hall, Harry following in his wake. "Let's discuss these things someplace more private." At the dead end, he opened the window and grabbed Harry by the shoulders before lifting up and floating out the window. Within minutes, Harry was seated on the snow covered rooftop of the castle, and Esdras was perched a few feet away on the tip of a spire. "Now, what on earth were you doing in Hogsmeade?"

Harry glared at the Dementor. "I was trying to enjoy myself. But then I had to go and hear all that. He killed my parents, Esdras. You couldn't possibly understand."

The Dementor's eyes flashed a horrible acidic green. "Don't you dare even begin to presume what I can and cannot understand, mortal. And do not begin to presume that you know the entire story of something that happened when you were still in the cradle." He relaxed slightly. "Harry, restricting you from Hogsmeade was a decision made with your best interest in mind before I was even given this assignment. For good or for bad, you need to accept that. Now I won't ask how you got into town or how you have an invisibility cloak, but I'm asking you not to try it again."

Harry glared. "I make no promises."

Esdras turned to face him, amused by his tone. "The third visit is still a ways away, well after Christmas break. I don't want you to try

something like this again. You got lucky this time that no one, mortal or Dementor, caught you.”

The younger wizard was now confused. “You mean you’re not going to tell anyone? Why?”

The Dementor shrugged and floated a lazy circle around the spire. “I could make you tell me everything, but you would resent me for it, and that wouldn’t help me since I’m trying to protect you and need you to trust me. Plus, I’d win no favor with Katie. But I am here to keep you safe, so I don’t want you trying something foolish like this again.” Harry shrugged indifferently; Esdras could tell his speech had gotten him nowhere. However, the mortal’s mood hadn’t improved despite assurances that he would not be punished. Esdras floated closer. “Something else on your mind?”

Harry slumped and sighed, looking off into the distance towards Hagrid’s cottage. “Buckbeak lost his case. They’re set to execute him in April.”

The Dementor sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Damn, you can’t catch a break, can you?” He looked around the steadily darkening sky for a moment. “Well, if anyone can find a legal loophole, it’ll be Hermione. I’d help, but my legal experience is limited to enforcement and less towards jurisprudence. Any good news?”

Harry shrugged. “Professor Lupin is going to teach me how to cast a Patronus after Christmas break.”

Esdras smiled. “That’s good news for me at least.” He floated over and turned his back to Harry. “Come on, let’s get down to dinner.”

Harry jumped onto Esdras’ back with some hesitation. The Dementor floated over the castle and came to a halt a few hundred feet above the front door. He smirked and looked over his shoulder. “You weren’t conscious when you fell off your broom, were you?” At the shake of the black haired head, Esdras’ smirk turned into a full smile. “Then you may find freefall slightly interesting.”

Esdras shut off his float bladders and fell like a stone. He was surprised to learn that the Boy Who Lived screamed like a girl.

Chapter 14: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

Esdras stood at the platform of Hogsmeade station, holding Katie's hands in his own. She was reminding him of their plans for the fifth time that morning. "Now, when you're finished your business on Azkaban, you're welcome to come and stay as long as you like. My parents said it was okay, and I think it would be good for you to see what a mortal Christmas is like."

The young Dementor smiled and nodded. "Yes, dear. It's just some basic debriefings I have to attend and Admiral Grim has already signed off on the holiday time. It shouldn't take more than a day or two. I'll be there on the forty ninth at the very latest."

His use of the Azkaban calendar didn't faze her since she had already been taught how to use it. In many ways, the Azkaban calendar was easier to figure out than the mortal calendar. Five months of sixty one days, and a sixth month of sixty. Leap years were even easier, with six months of sixty one days.

The Hogwarts Express blew its whistle, signifying that it was nearly time for the great engine to pull from the station. Katie nodded and smiled happily before hugging him tightly. "Oh, this will be so much fun. Just let me know the day, and I'll be waiting for you in Kilmarnock like we planned, alright?"

Esdras smiled and nodded before kissing her and shooing her onto the train. She climbed aboard, took her place in a cabin and lowered the window to wave to him as the train began to pull away from the station. The Dementor floated lazily alongside for a while until he came to the edge of the platform, he didn't stop waving until the train was out of sight.

Returning to the castle, Esdras wandered into the Great Hall and sat down at the Gryffindor table next to Harry, Ron, and Hermione. He watched the two boys play chess for a moment before speaking up. "Well, I'm going to be gone for break, but there will still be a minimum guard around, especially around Christmas. I'll be giving the troops with children time off, so don't do anything stupid."

Ron looked innocent, an impressive feat. "I don't know what you mean."

The Dementor rolled his eyes. "You wouldn't. But I'm serious, nothing stupid. Black is still out there, but you don't need to be reminded." He got up and stretched. "I'm going to pack my stuff. It's a rough trip to Azkaban if the winds aren't right."

The three looked up and waved their goodbyes, Hermione called out after him. "Have a safe trip, and good luck meeting Katie's parents."

Esdras lowered himself into a clearing near the lake, slung over his shoulder was a book bag containing his trunk, shrunken to the size of a shoebox. Transforming himself to his natural form, he floated slowly towards a non-descript tree and prodded a particular knot with his wand. The tree opened for him and he floated into the hollow space, closed the tree behind him, and began to descend into the space below.

The natural sight of Dementors meant that the chamber they had constructed two hundred feet below ground needed no lighting. It was cordoned off into a variety of rooms: a briefing room, tactical room, four division barracks, showers, kitchen, and a game room. Captain Demnin floated through the main corridor towards the tactical room, returning salutes from the troops attending to their duties. Waiting for him in the chamber, inspecting the massive map of the Hogwarts and Hogsmeade areas, was his executive officer. "*Good morning, sir.*"

The Dementor nodded. "*Good morning, Aaron. Report.*"

The commander made a vague sweeping motion of the map. "*The Ninety First Infantry has gone out on patrol. Nothing eventful happened during the train embarkation, as you probably noticed. And no sign of Sirius Black anywhere, it's still a waiting game.*" Aaron Reaping turned to face his friend and commanding officer. "*And the men are starting to wonder what their plans will be for the Christmas holiday.*"

The captain nodded. "*I figured as much. Orders are as follows: all personnel with family are to take leave as of the forty ninth day of*

Varaldes and shall return no later than the third of Induraldes, yourself included. Before you leave work up a light duty roster for the remaining troops that will allow them all the chance to return to the island for a few days each."

Aaron bowed. "Yes, sir. *Will you be coming to dinner this year?"*

Esdras shook his head and spoke in a bemused tone. "No, my friend, *not this year. Katie invited me to spend Christmas with her family and see what a mortal Christmas is like."*

The commander patted him on the back. "You really should come the day after, then. Christine would love to see you; you know how she worries about you. And the children will be disappointed if you don't show up. Hell, bring Katie along if you want. We live far enough away from the fortress."

A soft, echoing laugh filled the tactical room. "You're a riot, Aaron. Sure, I'll ask Katie if she wants to spend a day on Azkaban. I'll see how loud she screams. But your wife always worries about me, tell her I'll be there the day after and that I look forward to seeing her." He sighed happily and turned to face him. "I ought to be heading for the island. I've got a briefing with the Admiralty tomorrow morning. You are in command until I return. I would suggest giving Malachi command when you leave for Christmas."

The commander saluted. "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." When Esdras returned his salute, he continued. "Travel safely, and we'll see you on the fifty fifth."

The next morning, Captain Esdras Demnin stood before the imposing gates of the Azkaban fortress. To mortal eyes, at least, they were imposing. To Dementors the fortress constituted an eyesore on land that had once been the most productive green mint field on the entire island.

The captain passed through the gate and into the security checkpoint for the standard security tests. His wand was tested to make sure it was Dementor class and a Dementor guard approached and raised the sleeve of his cloak, making a small cut with a sharp knife. Black

blood flowed for a second before silver ichor healed the wound, proving his nature as Dementor. His wand was returned and he affixed his guard badge to the breast of his cloak and he was free to enter the prison.

After the night he had spent at home, Esdras realized that he definitely missed his island home, but not the fortress. He floated down the cold, grey halls accompanied by the sound of echoing cries and moans until he came to a door which he unlocked and passed through. The door tag simply said "*Guard Command Headquarters.*"

On the other side the door, a shapely Dementress rose from her secretary's desk and saluted. "*Good morning, Captain Demnin.*"

He returned the salute and bowed deeply. "*Good morning, Lieutenant Trieste.*"

She inclined her head and slipped from behind her desk. Like all Dementresses, she was nine feet tall and skeletally slender, but with an impossibly narrow waist that served to emphasize the rest of her physique and the fact that she was female. Her voice was playful as she scolded him. "*You leave on assignment for months at a time, don't write at all except for dispatches from the field, and all you can say is 'good morning, Lieutenant Trieste?' Come now, Esdras, we've been friends for how long now?*"

The captain laughed softly. "*We've been friends for sixty four years, Stephanie, since you graduated the academy. I'm sorry I haven't written, but I've been busy.*"

She brushed aside his concern. "*Of course you have, the hunt for chi psi three ninety is big. The Admiralty had to put their best man on the case.*"

Esdras ducked his head. "*Flattery will get you nowhere, Stephanie. Besides, what would Xander say?*"

At this, she sighed and seemed to crumple before him. "*He won't say much. He ended our relationship a few weeks ago.*"

The captain gasped and held the Dementress tight. *"Oh no! I'm so sorry, Stephanie. That's just terrible. What happened? Why didn't you write to me about it? I'm sorry I wasn't there for you."*

Stephanie shook her head and rested it against his shoulder. *"It's alright, I'm getting by and you had your duties. I'll tell you all about it over lunch?"* He nodded and she hugged him tightly for a second before letting go. *"Now, you should go. They're all waiting for you in there."*

Esdras smiled and gave her another squeeze before moving to the door that led to the inner office. Passing through the doorway, he came into the torch lit conference room of the Admiralty. The Dementor admirals floated next to desks that were arranged in one half of a semicircle. The other half of the semicircle contained the mortal auror commanders. Esdras stood in the center of the semicircle and saluted. *"Captain Esdras Tarsus Demnin reporting as ordered, sir."*

The familiar voice of Admiral Grim came from the gloom. *"Thank you for joining us today, Captain. It is good to see you again. We have a number of items to talk about, so let's begin. Tell us, how does the search for Sirius Black go?"*

The Dementor, still at attention, began to recount the last three and a half months of progress reports. He could only be sure of two things: this briefing would not be easy, and it would not be over quickly.

The evening of the twenty first, or the fiftieth in the Azkaban calendar, a slim figure appeared on the train platform in Kilmarnock, Scotland. No trains were scheduled for hours, and no trains had recently arrived. There were no footprints in the snow around him except for the ones his feet now occupied. Most alarming of all was how tired the young man looked. He shouldered a book bag and flipped the hood of his heavy winter jacket up before walking down the High Street, following the directions in his pocket that he had already memorized.

Coming to the proper alley, he turned right and went down it until he found an oddly colored brick. Giving a quick look around, Esdras

pulled out his wand and tapped the brick, opening the door to Kettletrap's Tavern, Kilmarnock's best wizarding tavern and inn. Stepping through the door immersed the traveler in a bright, warm room, decorated with old wood and brass, the picture perfect image of a pub, whether it be mortal or magical.

A fair-haired girl standing by the hearth looked up from her mug of butterbeer and smiled, indicating the traveler should approach and take the full mug sitting on the mantle beside her. As the traveler approached, he pulled his hood back, revealing glowing green eyes. "Sorry love, the crosswind across the Shetlands was killer."

Katie smiled and shrugged. "I didn't mind the wait. Would you like to rest for a bit or are you ready for the last leg." She indicated the pot of Floo powder sitting on the mantle. "Mom and dad are expecting us."

Esdras groaned. "I knew I forgot to do something before I left, I didn't file a request to have your home accept Dementor transit. I'll have to either fly or Apparate there."

Katie looked confused. "There's a difference?"

He nodded, taking a long sip of his warm drink. "Unless your fireplace is set up to accept Dementors, it'll just bounce me back to where I started from. And since this one isn't set up, either, it wouldn't even send me off."

Katie nodded and leaned against him. "Well, don't worry about forgetting, then. If the meetings were so bad that you had to take an extra day and still look like death warmed over on arrival, I suppose I should just be thankful that you were able to make it."

The Dementor smiled. "That's the spirit. Now you tell me how to get there and I'll be over shortly."

With a few more directions and a hastily sketched map, Katie was standing by the hearth, with a handful of Floo powder. "Now when I get there, I'll have mom send up red sparks. You can guide your way in with those." She tossed the powder into the grate and stepped into the green flames. "Bellmont!"

With her gone, Esdras quickly finished his butterbeer and hurried from the tavern and back into the alley. With a quick transformation, the lone Dementor began to float low over the town of Kilmarnock, heading east and passing over the outer suburbs and into the countryside. After a few minutes of following one of the Muggle roads, he saw a flash of red sparks off to his right.

The Dementor came to rest outside the gate of a well appointed house set back on a hillside, overlooking a fine, snow covered meadow. He paused at the gate and reached into his backpack, pulling out a vial of silver liquid and casting an enlarging spell on it to turn it into its original bottle shape. He quickly drained the ichor, replenishing his reserves that had been depleted from his trip against the prevailing winds; it would do him no good to feed upon his hosts. Returning the bottle to his bag, he opened the gate and walked up to the front door, where he transformed to his mortal form and knocked politely.

He had hardly brought his hand down before the door opened and he found himself tackled into the snow. He looked up into a pair of warm brown eyes framed by dark blond hair. "I see you found the place alright?"

Esdras got up from the snow and helped Katie up as well. "No problems at all."

Katie entered her house and took his winter coat and backpack. Placing them in the closet, she returned and took his hand, leading him down the hall towards a number of wonderful smells. They emerged into the kitchen, where the rest of the Bell clan was. Katie smiled happily and introduced them. "Esdras, this is my mother Elizabeth, my father Timothy, and my elder brother Eric. Everyone, this is Esdras."

Esdras bowed in the ancient manner and spoke the traditional words of greeting. "*A thousand years of blessings be upon this house, and all who shall enter into it.*" At their looks of confusion, he quickly translated it into English. "And my thanks for having me this Christmas."

Elizabeth Bell smiled and approached him with a cup of hot tea and a smile. "You're so formal, no need to be. Katie's friends are always welcome here." She placed the cup of tea in his hands. "Here you are, then. You must be cold after flying in. I don't see why you couldn't just Floo in. The hearth at Kettletrap's is a very smooth ride."

Before Esdras could answer, the men of the family rose from their seats and shook his hand. Timothy Bell spoke first. "Don't worry about that, I don't blame you. I can't stand the Floo myself. It's a pleasure to have you over."

Eric stepped up as well, making no secret of trying to determine his worth. "That's an interesting trick with your eyes, how do you make them glow?"

Esdras cocked his head to the side. "It's easier for me to see this way." He concentrated and the glow stopped. "There, now I look like a normal mortal."

Katie stepped up and slapped her brother playfully. "Don't give him a hard time, Eric. Esdras, you do whatever you want."

Mrs. Bell smiled as Esdras returned the glow to his eyes. "I think they look better that way anyway. Now, why don't you all go to the dining room, dinner is almost ready."

Thanks to the bottle of ichor he had drunk earlier, Esdras had eaten a normal mortal quantity of food. Sitting in front of the remnants of a most delicious apple crisp, the Dementor sighed happily, as quality had more than made up for quantity. "Thank you, Mrs. Bell, the meal was excellent. The best I've had in many years."

The matriarch smiled from her place at the end of the table. "You're welcome, dear."

From his place opposite his sister, Eric Bell observed the newcomer to the family table. "So, Esdras, where are you from? Katie didn't mention in her letters."

At this, Esdras' eyes grew wide as he looked beside him to Katie. "You didn't tell them?" His answer came when he noticed how wide his girlfriend's eyes were. The Dementor sighed and put on his best smile. "Azkaban, born and raised."

Silence descended upon the table. Mr. Bell spoke first, the beginnings of fear inflecting his voice. "Pardon me?"

The Dementor continued, since there was no going back. "Azkaban. I'm a Dementor."

The silence held for a moment more before it was broken by hearty laughter from the Bells. The patriarch recovered enough to talk first. "Oh, that's a good one, a Dementor. I like him, Katie, he's funny."

With a soft sigh, Esdras closed his eyes and took to his natural form, his cloak materializing behind him with the hood already lowered over his face. Within seconds, a nine foot tall Dementor sat uncomfortably behind a mortal dinner table. "This also explains the eyes, by the way."

The three Bells bolted and put the dinner table between them and the black cloaked Dementor. All had their wands out and leveled at him. Katie sighed and looked up from her apple crisp. "Oh, will you all relax."

Mrs. Bell tightened her grip on her wand. "Katie, I sent you all those Ministry brochures on Dementors after the Prophet broke the news that there was a Dementor going to Hogwarts."

Esdras, during all this, had taken another helping of apple crisp and looked up from his dessert. "Those Ministry brochure things are hilarious! I love the illustrations the most." He looked around the table, then hopefully towards Mrs. Bell. "Is there any more ice cream, ma'am?"

When there was no response, Katie huffed and got up to go to the kitchen herself. "Of course, Esdras. I'll get it for you." She passed by her family and muttered angrily. "I can't believe you all."

Eric leaned over to his father. "What's the spell that you're supposed to use to get rid of them?"

The Dementor looked up. "The Patronus charm, it's pretty tricky to master. You have to concentrate on a really happy memory. It takes a few months to get it right. If you want, I'll wait for you to learn it."

At this point, Katie came back into the dining room with two bowls of ice cream. She placed one in front of the Dementor and kept the other for herself before addressing her family. "Well, what's the matter? Are you afraid of the big, scary Dementor?"

Mr. Bell, sensing no current danger and being the man of the house, took it upon himself to be the first and slowly moved back towards the table, retaking his seat. As a sign of good faith, Esdras again became the blonde haired, green eyed mortal. Soon enough, the whole Bell family was again at the table. Mrs. Bell cleared her throat. "Well, Esdras, tell us what Azkaban is like."

Chapter 15 – Christmas in Kilmarnock

The next morning dawned bright and clear. Esdras, already freshly showered and dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and a hoodie which proclaimed it was “Property of Azkaban Athletic Department” floated down to the kitchen. The Bell family was already enjoying breakfast in the dining room when he entered. Katie looked up from her toast and smiled. “Good morning, sleepyhead.”

The Dementor rolled his glowing green eyes and sat down. “I do believe the bed in your guest room is the most comfortable bed I’ve ever slept on.”

Mrs. Bell laughed quietly and placed a large pot of oatmeal in front of him. At Esdras’ confused look, the matriarch smiled softly. “Katie told us how much you normally eat. If you don’t mind, I’d rather it be eaten than simply vanished away.”

Esdras smiled and began to eat almost ravenously. “Yes, ma’am!” He helped himself to some toast and looked around the table. “So, what is the plan for today?”

Mr. Bell looked up from the Daily Prophet. “We’ll be heading to Diagon Alley as soon as everyone is ready. Last minute Christmas shopping and all that, you know.”

The Dementor nodded and returned to his oatmeal. “That works out well. I haven’t had a chance to do much shopping at all with command responsibilities and debriefings. But I’ll have to make a stop at Gringotts first.”

The patriarch replied with a nod and returned to reading the paper. The rest of the meal passed in relative ease after the tension of the night before. At the end of breakfast, Esdras helped clear the table and went to work in the kitchen, helping to wash dishes before he was shooed out by Mrs. Bell, proclaiming that guests in her house were not required to do housework.

Katie smiled at him as he came into the living room after a repeat of the night before. “Mother is very strong willed when it comes to how

guests are treated in her house. I'm surprised she even let you clear the table."

Esdras sat down on the couch beside her. "I feel like I should be doing something to help out around here."

He was met with a sly grin. "Well then, I have been looking for a comfortable pillow." With that, Katie promptly leaned against him and began to continue working on the crossword in the Daily Prophet.

About an hour later, the four Bells and one Dementor were standing around the fireplace dressed in winter clothes. Esdras had his cloak, cap, and gloves on, his hood down, and Katie still leaning gently against him. Mr. Bell smiled and passed the pot of Floo powder around. "Alright then, Esdras, you'll be Apparating there?"

The Dementor nodded and gave Katie a quick kiss on the cheek before stepping away from her. Mr. Bell went first, then Eric. Esdras waited for Katie to step into the fireplace and call for Diagon Alley before disappearing from Bellmont with a nearly silent double pop.

Apparating just beside the Leaky Cauldron, Esdras looked around for a moment before stepping into the establishment. The Bells were standing near the fireplace, with Mrs. Bell just coming through and dusting herself off. He rejoined the group with a smile. "This is exciting."

Katie looked at him curiously. "Haven't you been here before?"

The family wound their way through the bar and out onto the street, blending into the rest of the magical population intent on Christmas shopping. The Dementor looked around with wide green eyes. "Once, to get school supplies, but I had a four auror detail boxing me in. I didn't get a chance to actually look around."

Katie nodded and slipped her hand into his. "Well, this is your chance, then."

And look around he did. Esdras peered into almost every store window on their way down the street to Gringotts. It took the three

remaining Bells to pull Esdras and Katie away from the Firebolt display in the window of Quality Quidditch Supplies. When they finally arrived at the bank, Esdras had compiled a long list of the stores he wanted to go into. Passing through the bronze, then silver doors, Esdras looked over to Katie. "Here's where I leave you, I need to go to my own vault."

She looked at him questioningly. "Why can't I come with you?"

The Dementor shrugged. "Well, I guess you can if you want to. Just...well, remember what kind of family I'm from."

She nodded quietly as he stepped up to the counter and addressed the goblin sitting behind it. "I need to access vault eight please."

The goblin, whose nametag read Morak, cast a critical eye over the glowing eyed mortal. "And who are you that thinks you can access that vault?"

Esdras placed a very complex looking golden key on the countertop and quickly transformed so that he was towering over the goblin, which rapidly backed away. Esdras quickly changed back to mortal form and took the key from the counter. "Will that be satisfactory, Morak?"

The goblin nodded and slowly began to regain his composure. "Of course, please come this way Mr. Demnin."

Within a matter of moments, the mortal, Dementor, and goblin were rocketing through the massive underground caverns that contained the Gringotts vaults. Their trip was intense and long, the cart rocketed down the rails as it descended lower and lower until finally coming to what appeared to be the bottom, where the rocky ground of the cavern was visible.

Esdras shouted over the wind to Morak. "How are Anna and Clara?"

The goblin nodded. "They're fine. Getting up in years, though. We'll be retiring them to Romania in a few more years. They're busy training their replacements."

Esdras smiled and turned to face Katie, who looked confused. "Dragons, they guard the high security vaults down here. They're wonderful girls." He returned his attention to the goblin. "Make sure they each get as many cows as they can eat for Christmas dinner, courtesy of Azkaban."

It was only a few seconds more before the cart came to a screeching halt. To their right was a large door marked with a simple number eight. The Dementor and goblin exited the cart, with the mortal following behind. Taking up positions on opposite sides of the door, Esdras transformed and called out to Morak. "Insert keys in three...two...one." They both put their keys into the locks simultaneously. "Turn key right in three...two...one." They both turned their keys to the right. Below the locks, black obsidian panels extended from the door. Both placed their hands on the panel and Esdras began to chant a spell in Azkabaaner.

Removing their hands from the panel, they waited for a second before the first of many locks began to disengage. When the last lock had cycled through, the door began to swing silently open. On the inside of the vault, torches lit, automatically illuminating the interior. Esdras entered, motioning for Katie to follow him.

Katie entered in a trance; the vault was huge, easily as large as three Quidditch pitches set end to end. In addition to the massive piles of Galleons, Sickles, and Knuts, there were numerous stacks of bricks of gold, silver, and platinum, as well as boxes filled with all manner of gemstones. "This is incredible, Esdras."

Esdras looked up from a stack of Galleons and looked around disinterestedly. "Yeah, only a little bit of stuff in here is actually the Demnin family fortune. Most of it is stuff that is being held in trust until the monarchy comes back into power." He smiled brightly. "Come on, I want to show you something."

She followed him deeper into the room, marveling over many ancient, priceless items until she came to a halt before a glass covered table. Inside rested a series of crowns, scepters, and swords. All of them gleamed in pure platinum. She gasped quietly as she stared inside the case. "Oh my, Esdras... Are these...?"

He nodded. "The crown jewels of Azkaban, they've been sitting here in storage for over a thousand years now. Every couple hundred years, we replace the lining on the crowns. Not even silk lasts forever."

Katie was speechless. The pinnacle crown, obviously belonging to the king, was an imposing affair of platinum, diamond, and gems that glowed green like Esdras' eyes. She looked closer. "What are those stones?"

"Fire emeralds. They're very rare, Azkaban has one of the only known mines and Dementors are allowed to control their availability in the market. Usually, we try to make them as unavailable as possible. Call it a bit of revenge, if you will."

She gazed at the glowing stones that graced the many crowns. "They're beautiful."

Esdras nodded and turned away. "Well, we can't waste our entire day down here." He looked at his watch and winced slightly. "I hope your parents aren't waiting for us."

Esdras and the Bells sat around a corner booth at the Leaky Cauldron after a full day of shopping. The bags piled at their feet indicated that they had been wildly successful. The Dementor had finished his mortal meal and was nursing a bottle of ichor next to Katie. She curiously eyed the silver liquid. "I thought you made that stuff yourself?"

Esdras nodded. "I do. But ichor doesn't go bad. When times are plenty, I can extract some and put it away for the lean times. I'm not on any set feed schedule here, so I have to keep myself out of passive feeding."

Mrs. Bell looked across the table to the two and smiled. "So, what did you buy, Esdras?"

The Dementor riffled through his bags and sighed. "Let's see, a necklace with a broomstick charm for Cho, some pretty earrings for Ginny, Quidditch Through the Ages for Roger, and some earrings and

Azkaban: A History for Hermione since she wants her own copy. I had to find a bookshop on Knockturn Alley for that one.”

Mrs. Bell’s eyes widened. “That’s an awful lot of jewelry.”

Esdras nodded. “In Azkaban culture, jewelry is given from Dementors to Dementresses at the start of a friendship as a sign of honor and respect. I figured I’d keep the tradition with my mortal friends, as well.”

Katie, who was well aware her name was left of the short list, leaned in a little. “What did you get me?”

He smiled playfully at her. “Coal, and lots of it.” This earned him a playful slap. “Seriously, I’m not telling you. But I will say that I have something for every one of my friends, even Harry and Ron.” At her look of interest, he continued. “Harry’s getting a mark thirteen cloak and Ron’s getting a gift certificate to Honeyduke’s.”

Katie laughed. “He’ll get some good mileage out of that.” She looked to his other side and saw another bag. “What’s in that bag, then?”

He pulled out the bag and opened it up. “Just some mortal gifts for the Reapings, since they invited me over on the twenty sixth. A book of crossword puzzles for Aaron, some colorful silk shawls for his wife Christine and his sister Sasha, and some mortal coloring books and a jigsaw puzzle for their children, Jacob and Calla.”

Her happy expression fell a little. “You’re leaving so soon?”

He shook his head. “Just for the day, for dinner.” He laughed quietly. “You were invited, too.”

His laughter was ceased when she replied almost immediately. “Wonderful, that sounds like fun.”

Esdras looked up to see the concerned expression on her parent’s faces. He quickly went into damage control mode. “Katie, this is Azkaban we’re talking about. It’s not exactly the most welcoming or hospitable place in the world.”

She shrugged and looked to her parents. "I've met Aaron Reaping. He's a nice Dementor, like Esdras. I wouldn't be in any danger, especially with Esdras to look after me, right?"

To avoid answering the question, the Dementor instead concentrated on chugging the remainder of his ichor, and took a long time doing it. His stall tactic was successful as Mr. Bell spoke up. "Well, would you be anywhere near the prison?"

Esdras shook his head quickly. "No sir, the prison is on the other side of the island beyond the South Mountain."

The elder Bell sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Well, it's up to you. If you want to take her, she can go."

The Dementor sighed. "I guess that settles it, then. A lady of the mortal house of Bell is not to be taken lightly."

This particular Christmastide in Kilmarnock was special because it dawned under a blissful fall of snow. As a result, the Bellmont estate was frosted in peaceful white except for a small spot of black balancing carefully atop a fencepost. Esdras floated calmly over the fence, looking out over the meadow with a cup of tea in his hand. It wasn't until a snowball hit him in the back that he turned around to see the smiling face of Katie in the doorway. "Happy Christmas, Esdras! Get in here and open your presents!"

The Dementor smiled and floated back across the snowy ground to reenter the house. After hanging his cloak in the closet, he went into the living room, which was decorated with a brilliant tree, and draped with fairy lights and small ornaments that glittered silver and gold. He took a place near the fireplace with Katie and waited as presents were handed out by Mr. Bell.

Katie, in addition to assorted other gifts from extended family and friends, got new dragon leather Quidditch gloves and a broom tuning guide from her parents and brother, respectively. From Esdras, she received a new mark thirteen cloak, cut especially for a mortal and tailored by one of the finest cloak makers on Azkaban. Wrapped

within the cloak was a small velvet box that upon opening made her gasp. “A fire emerald necklace?”

Esdras smiled and reached out to take it from her and clasp it around her neck. When the platinum chain was secured, all gathered around her and stared at the small glowing gem. “I rummaged through one of the boxes of small ones when we were in the vault after I showed you the crown jewels. I knew you liked the color.”

The Dementor was promptly tackled by the exuberant blonde and snogged for a moment in full view of her parents before she pulled away. She whispered happily to him in Azkabaaner. “*Thank you, darling. It is like your eyes.*”

The Dementor grinned and went about opening his own presents. The Bells had gotten him a small black teacup that was charmed to hold a whole pot of tea and keep it warm. Esdras smiled as Mrs. Bell took it from him and went to the kitchen to fill it. By the time she had returned, he was staring in shock at the present Katie had gotten him. He kept repeating the single phrase. “I can’t believe it...”

In his lap sat an ancient and weathered book bearing the title *The Azkaban Dementors: A Legacy*. He shook his head slowly and looked up at her with glassy eyes, questions written all over his face. Katie smiled softly. “You wouldn’t believe the looking I had to do to find that, I finally found it in a little bookstore at the very end of Diagon Alley. Would you believe that that was on the discount rack?”

Esdras cleared his throat and looked at the book again. “I don’t even know what to say...” He looked around to the curious Bells. “The only time this book was printed was in 1902.” He flipped through the pages until he came to a very old sepia photograph showing a group of Dementors mugging happily for the camera. He pointed to the youngest looking one in the shot. “There, that’s me back when I was a lieutenant commander. Goodness, I look young.”

The rest of the morning passed as a blur for Esdras as he sat, half involved in the conversation and half reliving memories nearly two centuries old as he looked through the photos. They all finally got up from the comfort of the living room around lunchtime to have a simple

meal, everyone was saving room for Christmas dinner, even the Dementor.

Afternoon ended up devolving into a combination snowball fight/Quidditch match. The rules were never fully figured out but it ended up involving points for snowball hits, Quaffles scored, and the catching of the Snitch. Esdras was not at all surprised to find out that Eric Bell had been a keeper for Gryffindor in his day; his imposing physical presence certainly lent himself to the part.

By dinnertime the three had returned to the house in various stages of cold and wetness. Both the Bells were positively freezing and soaking wet. Esdras had fared worse, being frozen and coated in ice, with stiff bending joints that creaked as the ice shifted when he moved. Katie saw him to the hearth and gave him a gentle push into the flickering flames, where he sat for a while, hissing steam as the ice melted off.

Christmas dinner was lavish, and large enough that even the insatiable Dementor was left floating in front of the warm hearth, feeling uncomfortably stuffed. When Katie came to join him, Esdras floated down to the soft carpet and held an arm out to her. She collapsed against him and rested her head on his shoulder. "I ate too much."

Esdras nodded. "I did, too. I didn't think that was possible." He sighed and rolled so the fire warmed a different side of his body and so that he faced her. "This isn't too much different from an Azkaban Christmas, except we have bonfires."

Katie smiled and snuggled in closer. "I'm sorry we're missing them tonight. But I am looking forward to tomorrow. How will we get there?"

Yawning, Esdras pulled her closer. "We'll need to leave here around three in the afternoon since we can't use a normal Floo connection to get to Azkaban. We'll Floo to London, use the Ministry Floo connection to Masha, the Central Valley mortal settlement, and then walk to the North Mountain caves."

This elicited an interested look. "There's a mortal settlement on Azkaban?"

The Dementor shrugged. "It's where the aurors sometimes stay, it's not always inhabited. There's not too much to it, a few houses and a pub with good food and clean bathrooms. You'd be surprised how important a clean bathroom can be on a gulag."

The voice that came from his shoulder was slow and tired. "How long will it take to get there once we get to Masha?"

Esdras closed his eyes, the fire was too comfortable. "Not long, North Mountain is only about a mile away. We could even take brooms if we wanted to."

There was no response, and opening an eye, Esdras noticed that Katie had fallen asleep, curled up with an iron grip on his arm. The Dementor smiled and closed his eyes again. It would be a while before Mrs. Bell came and woke the two up to send them back to bed.

Chapter 16 – In the Halls of the Island King

There were very few people at the Ministry of Magic the day after Christmas, since most of the regular staff had gone on holiday for the remainder of the week. So it was that when the solitary form of Katie Bell flooded into the entrance hall of the Ministry, there were very few people to notice. A few seconds later, a soft double popping sound announced the arrival of Esdras. He smiled and took her hand. "Follow me."

They moved to the visitor's check in booth and with a flash of his guard badge, which caused the guard manning the booth to shake in fear, they were through. Esdras led Katie to the elevators and pressed the down button. "The only Dementor rated fireplace is down with the holding cells that they use to hold wizards on trial at the Wizengamot. It was last used during the last war."

Katie nodded and stepped into the elevator with him. "So does that mean you've been here before?"

Esdras nodded. "I was part of the security detail that brought the high profile prisoners here for trial. Malfoy, Lestrangle, those types."

The elevator rattled slowly downward and Katie shivered at the mention of the infamous names. "That must have been fun."

The Dementor shook his head. "It was horrifying. Those people make even us sick." He noticed her expression had grown grave. "You can still go home if you want."

The mortal reached out and took his hand. "I'm okay, Esdras. We'll have a lovely time. Besides, I want to see your home."

When the elevator reached the lowest level of the Ministry, the pair exited the elevator and proceeded down the lone hallway. They came to an imposing steel door which opened automatically to allow them passage. Esdras looked over his shoulder and smirked. "They're enchanted to register a Dementor's presence and allow him passage."

There were five more doors like that before they came to a very small room with only a fireplace in the corner. The door closed behind them, casting them in total darkness. They illuminated their wands before Esdras turned to the fireplace and opened the pot of Floo powder. "Now, I'll go first and wait there for you. Remember the name of the place?" Katie nodded confidently and watched as Esdras stepped into the fireplace. "*Masha Tavern, Azkaban.*"

Once the green flames had disappeared, Katie stepped into the fireplace as well and looked around her surroundings. The shadows and ghosts of the past seemed to increase without the Dementor presence to halt them. She shivered briefly and tossed her powder into the grate. "*Masha Tavern, Azkaban!*" The world spun violently around her for a long moment as the international connection established, for a few seconds she could see the grey of the ocean as she spun. She stopped just as suddenly, kicked out onto a very clean hardwood floor.

It wasn't even a second before a pair of comfortable arms was around her. "Welcome to Azkaban, darling."

Katie staggered to her feet and brushed herself off. "That's the first time I've ever used an international Floo before." She looked around and noticed that they were in a small, but comfortable pub decorated in warm wood and covered in photos of the local Quidditch team. She walked up to the nearest wall and scanned the photos, pointing to one. "There you are."

Esdras leaned in and nodded. "Yes, that's me." He shouldered the bag of presents and began to walk to the door. "Come on, the Reapings are waiting."

Katie followed him out the door and gasped. The town of Masha stood in a small valley flanked on all sides by towering, steel grey, snow capped mountains. Mint fields were visible on the sides of some of the mountains, recognizable only because of the light green tint that the grey land took. In the grey sky, well defined airways crisscrossed the sky where lines of Dementors crossed between mountains and through the high mountain passes to other parts of the

island. The mortal looked around and gasped in surprise. "This place is beautiful!"

The Dementor nodded and pulled out their brooms. "Isn't it, though? The mountains alone would be enough to make us a tourist attraction for mountain climbing if it weren't for the prison."

They secured their capes, mounted their brooms, and took off, heading low over the valley towards North Mountain; they aimed for a long, narrow gap in the rock, where the airway entered into the living rock. Katie looked concerned, and shouted ahead to Esdras. "You know I can't see in the dark like you can, right?"

Esdras just called back. "Yeah, I know."

That did little to alleviate Katie as they passed into the heart of the mountain. She flew straight for a few seconds before the tunnel walls suddenly opened up around her, revealing a world cast in shades of glowing green. Looking to the rock around her as she passed she noticed bands of a familiar substance. "Fire emeralds!"

The Dementor slowed up and pulled her off to the side so they were closer to the edge of the cavern. The rock contained bands of the glowing stone. "All of the mountains here are striated with fire emeralds. They provide ambient light even though we don't need it. This whole community used to be a mine, but was converted about seven thousand years ago into a town. Anyway, let's get going."

The pair began the descent into the glowing abyss. Katie had no way to know how far down they had gone when Esdras finally landed on a ledge and came to a plain wooden door with a brass door knocker and nameplate identifying it as the Reaping residence. He took his natural form and rapped on the door with the knocker and waited with Katie.

The door slowly opened to reveal not a nine foot tall terror, but a four foot tall floating form in a black cloak stained with splotches of silver. The little Dementor child let out a squeal and jumped, latching itself to Esdras' waist. It called out happily into the house. "*Mama, papa, Lord Esdras has arrived!*" Katie laughed loudly at this, causing the child to

look fearfully up at her. He floated quickly back to the door, fear laced in his voice. *"Papa, it is a mortal!"*

Esdras laughed softly before taking her hand and stepping through the open door. Inside the Reaping house, the lines of fire emeralds glowed brightly, giving the house a welcoming feel. The main chamber was decorated as any living room would be, with family pictures and trinkets that spoke of many adventures to faraway places. It was a few seconds before Aaron and his wife Christine came in. However, instead of the normal casual greeting that Katie had witnessed before, both knelt before Esdras. *"We welcome you, Lord Esdras. A thousand blessings upon the royal house."*

Esdras sighed and looked uncomfortable, even for a Dementor. *"I hate it when you do this!"* They remained kneeling and Esdras turned to face Katie. "In public, the royal house has no power. In private, some families still keep to the old traditions. Unfortunately for me, Aaron is one of them." He quickly spoke the ancient reply. *"And a thousand blessings be upon this loyal house."*

Aaron rose up and shook hands with Esdras, switching to English to accommodate his guest. "I'm glad you could make it, old friend." He turned to face the mortal. "Katie, welcome to our home. This is my wife Christine."

The slender Dementress bowed deeply and offered her hand to Katie, who took it without hesitation. She spoke with a thick accent, carefully pronouncing her words. "We welcome you, mortal Katie. I try speaking mortal for you."

Katie smiled at her attempt at English and bowed in return. *"You speak well, Christine. I thank you, my Azkabaaner is slow yet."*

The Dementress let out a sound of surprise at her attempt at Azkabaaner. She excused herself for a moment and returned quickly with the child they had encountered earlier and a small cloaked bundle. "This is son, Jacob Reaping. This is daughter, Calla Reaping."

The elder child knelt before Esdras and the scene repeated, with Esdras just as uncomfortable. He turned to Katie. "Jacob is thirty five. Calla is ten."

The mortal smiled and doted over Calla, who at only two feet tall was still cradled in her mother's arms. "She's so small..."

Aaron came up, with Jacob lifted in his arms. "Well, Dementor anatomy doesn't allow much room for a cloaking to grow." He put an arm around his wife, who hid further behind her hood in embarrassment as attention was brought to her impossibly narrow waist. "Let me show you around, Katie. Esdras has seen the place already."

Katie found that the home of the Reaping family was surprisingly spacious, homey, and warm. When she and Aaron returned from the tour of the house, she found Esdras hard at work in the kitchen peeling potatoes. Beside him sat a bottle. He noticed her attention. "Jacob, would you bring Katie a bottle of the white label green mint beer?"

The young Dementor nodded and floated to the pantry closet, from which he pulled a brown bottle with a white label. He hesitantly handed it to the mortal and floated back to his building blocks, eyeing her curiously through his hood. Katie looked to the bottle in her hand. "So this is the stuff you were telling me about when we first went to Hogsmeade?"

Esdras nodded and took a pull from his own bottle before returning to peeling potatoes. Katie popped the cork from her bottle and took a cautious sip. A tingling sensation of mint and carbonation filled her and left her warm on the inside. She coughed lightly. "Strong."

The Dementor laughed. "That's the weakest kind they make. You don't want to drink the black label." He turned his bottle to face her, indicating a grey label. "Not even I drink the black label."

Katie looked at the bottle again. "Mint beer, mint crèmes, mint fields. What is it with Dementors and mint?"

Christine, carrying a pan to the oven, responded. "Mint is good for Dementor. Helps digest souls well, makes super...supersol...noid?" Katie nodded that she understood. "Mint makes it strong, makes Dementor strong."

Katie nodded in understanding. She took another sip of her drink and smirked at her companion. "So how come the rightful king of all Dementors is peeling potatoes for dinner."

Esdras narrowed his hood at her and huffed gently. "I had to order Christine to let me peel them. That's the only way I'll get to help in this house."

At this, Christine turned from the stove to regard her guests, her hood lowered in respect. "That is because you are corvades." She paused for a second and struggled for the word. "You are...you are royal?"

The Dementress looked to the mortal for confirmation that her English was correct. Katie nodded. "Yes, he is corvades."

Any argument from Esdras was cut off by the front door opening and a delicate voice calling out. "*Brother, sister in law, niece, and nephew?*"

Jacob floated up from the floor and rushed out into the living room. "*Aunt Sasha, aunt Sasha, there is a mortal here!*"

There was a delicate laugh from the newcomer, and the voice grew closer to the kitchen. "*Jacob, child, you are full of stories. No mortals come to visit...*" Her voice was stilled as she entered into the kitchen and caught sight of Katie sitting at the table next to Esdras, who was still peeling potatoes. She knelt quickly, her voice playful as she spoke. "*I welcome you, Lord Esdras. A thousand blessings upon the royal house.*"

Esdras didn't look up. "*And a thousand blessings be upon this loyal house. Hello Sasha, this is Katie.*"

Katie smiled and extended her hand to the Dementress, who quickly took it. Sasha regarded the mortal with a wide hood for a second before speaking, her voice still light and playful as she spoke perfect

English. "It is good to meet the one who has captured my godfather's heart."

Esdras, finished with the potatoes, picked up the pot and took it to the stove. "Sasha is my eldest godchild, her parents begged me to agree. Aaron did the same thing when his children were born, too."

The lone mortal looked confused. "If Esdras is your godfather, then how old are you, Sasha?"

Sasha inclined her hood. "I'm only one hundred thirty seven."

Aaron, by this point, had entered the kitchen, and caught his little sister in a hug, spinning her around. "Sasha is just a cloakling, even if she is the best singer and songwriter on Azkaban."

Cuffing her brother on the shoulder, she was quick to argue with him. "I most certainly am not. I just happen to have a few fans that are very loyal."

Esdras looked up from the potatoes. "And the patronage of the royal house, if it comes back into power again."

The laughter and conversation continued until dinner was prepared, the line between mortal and Dementor thinning as Esdras showed his godchildren his mortal form. Katie was constantly asked questions about mortal life, which the Dementors all found fascinating.

By the end of the evening, Jacob Reaping had fallen asleep in Katie's lap. As he snored quietly, he began to slowly rise up and float a few inches over her. It was at this time that Christine came and collected the small Dementor, taking him to his bedroom to put him to bed.

The floor of the once neat living room was littered with wrapping paper, jigsaw puzzle pieces, and books, a testament to how the children enjoyed their gifts. Both Sasha and Christine had wrapped their shawls around their shoulders, and Katie had come away with a pair of fire emerald hair clips shaped to look like butterflies. Esdras, as a joke, had received a long sleeve t-shirt which bore the seal of the Azkaban Super-maximum Security Wizarding Prison on the front

and had "INMATE" written in large letters on the back. It had taken a few minutes to convince Katie that shirts like this were not standard issue to the inmates.

With night falling at the surface, it came time for the visitors to pack up and head back to the town to Floo back home. Standing at the doorway to the Reaping residence, Katie surprised them by giving all three Reapings a hug. "Thank you for opening your home to me. I hope one day to return the honor."

Aaron bowed to the mortal in gratitude. Esdras made his round as well, finally coming to Aaron and shaking his hand firmly. "*Peace be upon this house and all who enter within, my friend.*"

The commander smiled and bowed to his friend. "*Long live the house of Demnin, my Lord.*"

With a final wave, the two were away on their broomsticks, ascending quickly through the glowing green cavern until the opening that led to the central valley was visible. Esdras, in mortal form, yawned. "Well, what do you think of Azkaban and her people?"

Katie shook her head, raising her voice to speak over the wind as they proceeded towards the glowing lights of Masha. "I can't believe you are considered dangerous creatures. I've never been so well treated in my life. I'd love to come back here."

Esdras laughed. "That can be arranged. Let's just get home first, I'm tired."

Katie smiled and looked over, a hint of challenge in her eyes. "Race you to the tavern."

Chapter 17 – Return of the Grind

Esdras stood at the station as the Hogwarts Express pulled in. He had been at the school for two days now, organizing the Dementors who had recently returned from the Christmas holiday. Not surprisingly, no one really wanted to be back, especially the ones with families. He had been slowly ramping operations back up to full speed, so hopefully everyone was ready for action again. He looked upwards to the floating forms one hundred feet up; the Eighth Infantry was currently monitoring the students as they traversed from station to school.

The train came to a stop and, sure enough, the first person out of the car three down from where he was floating was Katie. She smiled and waved as Esdras floated towards her, withdrawing his wand and giving a casual flick so her trunk levitated and followed behind her. "Welcome back, my dear."

Katie grinned and jumped up, latching onto him, causing him to glide backwards against the side of the station. She gave him a kiss that was only ceased by cat calls from Alicia and Angelina exiting the train. "I missed you, you know."

The Dementor laughed and Katie entwined her arm with his, leaning gently against his shoulder as they walked. "It was only two days."

She nodded. "Two days is two days too long."

Esdras smiled to himself and spoke with a voice of cool indifference. Having been at school for three days already meant he was ahead in the gossip mill. "So, Harry got a Firebolt for Christmas."

The effect was instantaneous and expected. Katie flew from his arm and spun him around to face her. Their stop was so fast that the hovering trunk tapped them in the legs. "He got a what? Who gave it to him? Has he ridden it yet? Of course he has, he'd be a fool not to. What did he say about it? This is incredible."

The Dementor made a soothing motion with his hands and held her down by the shoulders to keep her from bouncing out of her shoes. "Careful there. It didn't come with a gift tag, and with Sirius Black

around, there's a good suspicion it might have been him, and that means that it's a suspicious gift. It's been confiscated and McGonagall and Hooch are breaking it down to see if there are any hexes on it. But it looks absolutely incredible."

Katie sighed and thumped him on the chest. "That's massively unfair. Tell me all about that and make me all hopeful about our chances against you in Quidditch only to take it all away from me."

Esdras laughed. "Well, I personally hope that he gets it back before the match. He does need a new broom and it would be unfair for someone as good as him to ride on anything less."

They walked towards the Thestral drawn carriages and embarked the nearest one after Esdras had given the spectral steed a quick pat. Katie looked at him curiously. "What was all that about?"

The Dementor looked grim for a second. "These carriages are pulled by Thestrals. You can only see them if you've seen death. I've seen quite a bit."

Katie wisely let the topic rest as the door opened again to admit a slender raven haired girl. Cho smiled when she saw her fellow occupants. "Oh, hello Katie, hello Esdras." She smiled brightly at the Dementor and flipped her hair over her shoulder to show off a silver broomstick dangling off a chain. "Thank you so much for the necklace."

Esdras nodded. "You're my friend, it's a traditional gift. And I thought you might like it."

She heartily agreed and the three discussed their holidays as the carriages began the slow trek to the gates of the school.

With classes again in session, the days passed with a clockwork precision. So it was with a great amount of surprise when one evening in the last week of January the portrait hole to the Gryffindor common room opened to reveal the hooded form of a Dementor. He poked his hood in slowly and looked around the gathered crowd of

students and called to the nearest one. "Excuse me, but is Katie Bell here?"

Ginny Weasley, who had been sitting in a comfortable chair near the portrait hole for lack of space near the fireplace looked idly over at the Dementor, a sight which months earlier would have brought about no small amount of terror, and smiled. "Sure Esdras, come on in and I'll get her."

The Dementor slinked in slowly and stood upright near the portrait hole, straightening his robes, and bowed politely. "I am not the captain, ma'am. I am Commander Aaron Reaping."

The redhead cast a critical eye over the new Dementor, when he stepped into the light it was obvious that he wasn't Esdras. She couldn't tell how, but he simply looked different. Then it clicked. She had seen another Dementor conversing with Esdras in the Entrance Hall of the castle, but this was the first time she had seen him come so far inside. "Alright then, commander. Wait right here."

She walked quickly up the stairs to the fourth year dorm room and quickly brought down Katie. When she saw her visitor she smiled brightly and walked up to him. "Hello, Aaron. What can I do for you tonight?"

The Dementor bowed lightly and lowered his voice. "How much do you know about Dementor birthdays?"

Katie's eyes shot up in surprise. "Virtually nothing. Why? When is Esdras'? I didn't miss it, did I?"

Aaron shook his hood quickly. "No, not at all. His birthday is tomorrow, I just wanted to see if he had told you and if you had anything planned for him. I have already asked his housemate, Cho, and she knew as little as you did."

The mortal regarded the Dementor with curiosity. "Why didn't he tell me?"

The commander sighed softly. "Birthdays for Dementors don't arouse a large celebration because we are so long lived. I'd be surprised if

Esdras even remembers it tomorrow. You should not take offense, it's just something that we don't think of. It is our way."

Katie narrowed her eyes. "Well, Esdras may be a Dementor but while he's here, he's also a mortal. I want to at least have some sort of party for him. He'll be three hundred thirteen?" The commander nodded. "Alright then, I would like your help. Can you meet with me tomorrow after breakfast by the gates?"

Aaron nodded and laughed softly. "Esdras will have our cloaks for tablecloths if he finds out we were involved in this."

Katie laughed and followed him as he floated across the common room to a window. "Don't worry, I'll take responsibility for the whole affair. He wouldn't hurt me."

The commander opened the window and floated out into the darkening evening. "I should hope not, but I do not know how well he will take a surprise. Good night, Katie."

Bidding the Dementor good night, Katie closed the window and sat down. The ghastly visitor had brought some attention and she was soon surrounded with a few people interested in what the Dementor had wanted. Katie shooed them away and got up, intent on taking charge of this situation. "Ginny, where are the twins? Hermione, let me see Azkaban: A History."

The next morning, Esdras Tarsus corvades Demnin woke up, got out of bed, took a shower, put on clean robes and a cloak, and wandered out into the Ravenclaw common room. He floated down the hallway and glided over the banister, down the stairwell and drifted into the Great Hall, intent on finding breakfast. The table was set normally, and he was pleased to see that there was a great amount of pancakes waiting for him, his favorite.

That was when he noticed the smooth black stone next to his place setting. He peered curiously at it and picked it up. As he inspected it more closely, a pair of slender arms wrapped around his shoulders and a dulcet voice spoke quietly from behind him. "*The stone is permanent, child of Azkaban, it changes not from year to year.*"

Esdras closed his eyes. He knew the words well and repeated the next line. *"But we are not the stone, mortal child, our time is measured by the sand instead."* He leaned back and kissed Katie softly on the cheek. "How did you know?"

Katie smiled and squeezed him tighter. "A little bird told me today was your birthday. I thought I'd combine some Azkaban and mortal traditions together. I liked this one because it was so quiet and simple."

The Dementor laughed and conjured a small bag to put the stone in it. "Yes, well you're not the one who has to carry the stones around all day."

She laughed and hugged him again. "Don't complain. They're for good luck."

So it was that for the rest of that day, Esdras carried around a steadily growing satchel of small stones. He had to enlarge it four times as housemates, friends, and professors presented him with the simple gift. Before lunch, he left the castle grounds to meet with Aaron, and was greeted by all four divisions of Dementors under his command, all with stones to give to their commander. At lunch, Luna Lovegood, in her normal, curious fashion, presented him with a butterbeer cork that she had painted to look like a rock. The Dementor accepted it without hesitation.

By the end of the day, he was comfortably weighted down by the number of stones in his satchel and glided peacefully towards the common room. The coat of armor waited for him, serene as always. As he approached, the armor held out his gauntlet, a stone resting in the palm. "The stone is permanent, child of Azkaban, it changes not from year to year."

Esdras laughed loudly and swept the stone up into his bag. "But we are not stone, metal child, our time is measured by the sand instead." He smiled at his hollow metallic friend and gave the password. "Anvil."

The armor stepped aside and held the door open for the Dementor. Upon his entry he was showered with confetti and a loud cry rose from the common room. "Happy birthday, Esdras!"

A fast moving blonde figured collided with him, hugging him tight. Katie looked up at him with bright brown eyes. "You did the Azkaban thing all day, now you get to experience a mortal surprise party. This is our gift to you since you didn't tell anyone your birthday was coming."

Looking around, the Dementor could see that the tables of the common room had been set up with drinks and all sorts of snacks and desserts. The cause of this was pair of grinning redheads in the corner. A surprising number of other Gryffindors and a few Hufflepuffs, including their entire Quidditch team, had shown up as well. Esdras looked around in amazement at the number of people in the common room. "This is certainly a surprise, what do I do?"

Cho came up and handed him a bottle of butterbeer. "You party."

Later, once the crowd had cleared out, leaving a rather battered looking common room, Esdras got the full story. In the course of one evening, Katie had organized the whole party and told everyone about the ritual of stones. Cho secured the location by bribing the coat of armor guarding the common room with the offer of a fresh polishing. Fred and George, through their normal unknown means, had obtained an extravagant amount of food. Aaron had provided the drinks, and there would be stories for months in Hogsmeade about how a Dementor had come to town asking for five cases of butterbeer. The guests had simply shown up, whether by invitation or by word of mouth.

As the Dementor floated into bed that night, he laughed quietly to himself. Three hundred thirteen was a good number.

Later into the next month, the whole of Ravenclaw was sitting down to dinner as was standard for the end of the school day. The only uncommon thing was a large commotion coming from the Gryffindor table. Roger looked up and stood up a little to see over the Hufflepuff table to see what was going on. "I wonder what they're on about."

Esdras looked up as well, and floated a little to see what Roger was looking at. He shrugged lightly. "I don't know, want me to find out?"

Roger shrugged in reply and returned to his pot roast. "If you want to."

The Dementor floated out of his seat, grabbed a few rolls and floated over the Hufflepuff table, being careful to avoid the candles that illuminated it. When he cleared the table he swept low again, floating along to the source of the commotion, which was coming from the Gryffindor Quidditch team. He floated behind Katie and wrapped his arms around her. "Well, what's all this then?"

Katie squealed and turned, tackling him and causing the pair to float out into the aisle before Esdras could stabilize them. She didn't seem to mind. "Harry got the Firebolt back! This is wonderful!"

The Dementor looked curiously over her shoulder to the grinning Potter. "Really, you got it back? Are you sure they checked it thoroughly? I could give it to the guys and have them check it out for you, we'd be very careful. It could take months."

Harry smiled and shook his head. "No thank you, I'll trust Madame Hooch. Besides, you just want to keep me off that broom."

Esdras nodded fiercely. "You're damned right I do." He shrugged and took on an air of aloof indifference. "But, it doesn't matter. One moderately skilled mortal seeker on a high powered broom shouldn't be any trouble."

Releasing Katie with a smile and a kiss, Esdras floated back over the Hufflepuff table and returned to his seat. His eyes were set hard and Roger immediately knew something very bad was up. "He got it back, didn't he?"

The Dementor nodded. "Don't worry. We'll be ready for him."

Chapter 18 – Ravenclaw vs. Gryffindor

The Ravenclaw Quidditch team sat in the locker room after practice, leaning heavily against the nearest solid support. With the game at the end of the week, they were still at a loss as to how to stop, or at least slow down, Harry and his new Firebolt. Everyone had seen the speed that he could harness on that broom and knew that Cho on her Cleansweep would be no match for it.

Roger sighed and looked around again. “Esdras, you’re an expert with the Bludgers. Can you do anything to slow him down?”

Esdras shook his head. “Anything I could do would depend entirely on if I can get my hands on a Bludger. Unless you want me to knock him out or something, but I won’t do that. Besides, if Fred and George think I’m trying to hog the Bludgers, they’ll keep them away from me. In fact, they’re probably already planning to do that in order to take me out of the equation.”

The others sighed and returned to their glum expressions. Roger laughed sadly. “You wouldn’t consider accidentally forgetting to charm your robes with the protective spells, would you?”

Glowing green eyes narrowed and an icy, echoing voice replied. “Don’t even joke about that, Roger.”

The captain gave a nervous laugh. “Sorry.” He composed himself and gave a resolute look to the seeker. “Well, Cho, it falls on you to stop the Boy Who Lived. You’ll just have to make sure you find the Snitch before he does.”

Esdras perked up at this. “Wait, that’s our answer! The Boy Who Lived!”

Britten looked curiously at his immortal friend. “What on earth are you talking about, Esdras?”

The Dementor laughed gleefully. “Oh, this is perfect.” At the confused looks of his teammates he laughed harder. “Don’t you see? Harry is a guy, and Cho here is a very attractive girl.” Cho blushed at this

compliment, but Esdras continued on. "Mortal hormones are raging around this age, right? We'll just have to, well, use all our resources."

Cho blushed harder and shook her head. "That wouldn't work." She looked very sad for a moment. "Besides, he's probably not interested in me at all."

Esdras smirked. "Cho, he'd have to be dead not to be interested in you. And since I can see him, he's obviously not. I'm asking you as your teammate to try to turn up the charm when we're on the pitch. Distract him as best you can."

Britten stood beside his fellow beater and nodded. "It's up to you, Cho. You can do it."

The voices of the other members of the team encouraged her. She nodded resolutely. "Okay, I'll do it. But what if he isn't interested?"

Esdras smiled. "Well, I have one more option, but it's for emergency use only."

The morning of the match dawned clear, perfect Quidditch weather. The excitement in the school was almost palpable, with everyone intent on supporting their favorite team in the upcoming match. Both teams, however, kept in seclusion for breakfast, which wasn't a problem for anyone other than Esdras and Katie. Both would occasionally look up from the table and scan the Great Hall, trying to catch the eyes of the other. When they finally did, all they could do was smile nervously at each other.

Getting dressed in the locker room, the boys gave Cho a once over to make sure their plan would go off without a hitch. Esdras sniffed the air lightly. "Is that lavender perfume, Cho?"

She nodded. "I feel strange wearing it to play Quidditch."

The others caught a whiff of it and smiled. Chambers shrugged. "I don't know, I think it's a nice touch. It takes the edge off the leather glove smell."

Esdras nodded and looked to their seeker one last time. He sighed. "Cho, please forgive me for this..." Before she could ask what to forgive him for, Esdras had reached out and unbuttoned one of the buttons that secured the top of her Quidditch robes. The result wasn't obscene, but it revealed more than normal. He stepped back with the others and looked at the result. "If I weren't dating Katie, I'd be very conflicted about my feelings for you, Cho."

The others gave their compliments as well and smiled confidently to each other before taking up their brooms and waiting for the call. Lee Jordan called out over the cheering crowd. "Now taking the pitch is Ravenclaw: Page, Davies, Bradley, Chambers, Demnin, Britten, and Chang!" They circled the pitch and waved before taking their places at the far end of the field.

Lee Jordan's voice again rang loudly across the pitch. "And here comes Gryffindor: Wood, Johnson, Spinnet, Bell, Weasley, Weasley, and Potter!" The cheers rose loudly from the grandstands as the red robed opponents took their places on the opposite side of the field from the blue robed Ravenclaw.

Esdras floated away from his position to the midline of the field and waved for Katie to do the same. He shouted to her over the roaring crowd. "You ready, Gryffindor?"

She smiled, looking positively radiant as the wind whipped her long hair about. "You're going down, Ravenclaw."

Below them, Oliver and Roger were shaking hands. A loud cheer caused them to direct their attention skyward. High above, Esdras and Katie were locked in one of the more passionate kisses that the school had ever seen. Esdras broke the kiss reluctantly and glided back a few feet. "Good luck, darling."

She laughed and gave her most seductive smile. "Good luck, my dear."

Floating back to his position, he was met by Roger who looked him square in the eyes. "She's the opponent this time, Esdras. You can't go easy on her."

The Dementor lowered the hood of his blue cloak and secured the cobalt glasses on his eyes. His voice was cold and emotionless. "Once the Quaffle is in the air, she means nothing to me. Death to the opposition."

So it was that when Katie received the Quaffle and began her run towards the Ravenclaw hoops, the first opponent she encountered was Esdras. She smiled seductively at him, but he still fired a Bludger directly at her. This caused her to veer away and ultimately led to Bradley stealing the Quaffle from her and scoring ten points for Ravenclaw. She returned back and shouted to Alicia and Angelina. "It's not working, I can't distract him. He's gone all Azkaban guard on me."

Harry dodged another excellently hit Bludger courtesy of the Ravenclaw Dementor. Cursing the immortal softly, he wondered when Fred and George would actually begin trying to keep him away from the Bludgers like they had planned. Scanning the pitch quickly, he came up with no sight of the Snitch, or at least it wasn't in the part of the pitch he scanned before his eyes came to a dead halt on Cho, who was floating a few feet away. The sight of her was enchanting.

Cho did happen to see the Snitch and dove to make the retrieval. Harry followed her, flying quickly alongside and trying to gently nudge her aside so that he could get the winged ball. She, however, was actively crashing into him, which he didn't seem to mind at all. This particular chase was ended by a hastily shot Bludger from Fred, which Cho avoided by ramming into Harry, knocking them both away from the Snitch, which disappeared in the resulting melee.

The rest of the Ravenclaw team was reduced to laughter when Oliver Wood loudly accosted Harry. "Potter, quit being such a gentleman and put some muscle into it! Get the Snitch!"

Either the words of his captain or the laughter of his opposition seemed to incense Harry. He began pushing the Firebolt to its limit. Cho was having trouble keeping up as he dove when he caught glimpses of the golden ball. Finally, she called down into the fray. "Esdras, it's time! Get up here!"

The Dementor rose from the chaos below, looking for the entire world like a great blue shark and wearing an evil grin. "Someone say my name?"

Cho shouted to him again. "It's time to end this! This is the emergency you were talking about!"

Esdras nodded and shrugged out of the top of his Quidditch robes, tying the arms around his waist to keep the robes secure. With a single pull at his undershirt, the fabric sheared away, leaving him shirtless. Below this, Katie looked up in awe and promptly lost possession of the Quaffle. Esdras began to chant a spell in Azkabaaner that she was unable to hear, but she did notice that a glowing silver band appeared just below both of his shoulder blades.

The Dementor inverted himself and came to rest beneath Cho, docking their brooms together and holding tight to both. Harry looked over at the joined pair with curiosity. "What's going on?"

Cho smiled and flipped her hair over her shoulder. "You want to play it easy, we'll play it easy. You want to play it hard..."

The last part of the quote was missed as Harry bolted off at top speed. He had spotted the Snitch at the other end of the field. Below her, Cho heard Esdras activate the spell he had cast. "*Afterburners!*" With a loud shrieking sound, twin jets of silver flame shot from below the shoulder blades of the Dementor, propelling them after Harry. The three raced after the Snitch, their speeds now equal. They approached the Snitch at top speed with Harry just a little ahead after having started early. Seconds before he could grab the Snitch, Esdras accelerated and spun his and Cho's broom, turning the silver flames towards Harry. The black haired Gryffindor pulled up in surprise, causing him to miss the Snitch. But the redirection in thrust meant that Cho was also unable to take the Snitch before it disappeared in the mess on the pitch.

Harry flew back around and regrouped with his team. He shouted to Katie. "What was that? What the hell did he do back there?"

She shook her head and waved her hands in front of her. "Hey, don't think I know everything about him. He's a magical creature and a dark one at that, he's got powers within powers on top of powers."

He looked to the stands and shouted again, before turning his eyes again to the pitch to look for the Snitch. "Hermione, what was that?"

A frazzled voice replied. "I don't know, I don't have Azkaban: A History with me."

Katie passed the Quaffle to Angelina and called out before flying ahead to join them. "Check the medic's spell, see what he's doing."

Hermione pulled out a sheet of parchment and cast the spell herself, a testament to the effectiveness of Azkabaaner language books. As the parchment came to life she could see something severely strange going on in the torso of the Dementor. Flipping the paper over to look at the dorsal view, she gasped. She shouted out to the seeker who was still hovering within earshot. "Harry, I don't know what he's done, but he's managed to directly link his float bladders into his supersolenoid. The flames coming from his back are some sort of ichor plasma."

Harry sighed. "In English, Hermione!"

The advantage of being Muggle raised was that they could both understand the same references. "He's strapped a jet engine to his back, and he's his own fuel source."

Once, at Privet Drive, Harry had gotten the chance to watch a few minutes of an American movie about Muggle airplane pilots at a military training school. He remembered very little of it except that they flew very fast and made all sorts of death defying maneuvers while attempting to shoot the other person down. It had been called a dogfight, and Harry Potter realized that he was now in a dogfight on broomsticks.

The Cho/Esdras combination flew with practiced efficiency. It was obvious that Cho was still controlling direction; he knew how she flew like the back of his hand. Esdras was providing the speed, the

glowing silver flames on his back growing and shrinking as needed. The Dementor would occasionally hit at a Bludger sent up by Fred or George in an attempt to dislodge him from his position. Even more often would he disengage his broom from the pairing and dive bomb the others below with a Bludger or startle them by diving directly in front of them and bathing them in the wash of his silver flames. The scare tactics were taking their toll, and Ravenclaw was slowly climbing up on the scoreboard.

Currently, both seekers and the Dementor engine were in midair over the pitch, scanning for the Snitch. When Harry flew off again after the Snitch, Esdras looked up at Cho and called over the roar of the afterburner flames. "We end this now!" Accelerating diagonally across the pitch and gaining on the Gryffindor, they pushed their brooms to the maximum as they began to close on the small golden ball. And then Harry saw the Dementors.

What Esdras saw was something different. Beneath the black cloaks he could detect the glowing forms of mortals. He pushed their brooms onward as Cho pointed. "Esdras, are those guys yours?"

The Dementor shook his head and shouted over the roar of the rushing air. "They're not Dementors, just mortals in cloaks."

Whether or not Harry heard this statement would be argued for weeks after the fact. He raised his wand and pointed it at the counterfeit Dementors. Esdras looked up as he heard the spell he was casting. "Expecto Patronem!"

Through cobalt lenses, his green eyes widened in horror. He just barely managed to disengage his broom from Cho's before the spell was cast and the blinding silver light poured from the tip of Harry's wand. The mortal form that Esdras wore was ripped from his Dementor body and the glowing animal, which Esdras never got a chance to see, forcefully dislodged him from the broom and threw him towards the Hufflepuff grandstand. Moving and over seventy miles per hour, all the Dementor could do was close his eyes before he hit.

Without the added speed, Cho was unable to match the Firebolt. Without the added speed, Harry grabbed the Snitch and Ravenclaw

lost the match. The seven Gryffindor players met in midair and cheered wildly before descending to the pitch. The six Ravenclaw players raced to the wreckage of the lower Hufflepuff grandstands to dig out their fallen comrade. It was minutes into the celebration before Katie noticed that the blue cloaked figures were frantically digging through the wooden wreckage. When she noticed which of the team was missing, she descended to the pitch and ran as fast as she could to help.

On her way there she raced past McGonagall, dragging behind her most of the third year Slytherin complement. She made it to the wreckage just as they pulled the final piece away and the shirtless Dementor floated up from the ground. He paused for a moment to change into mortal form before kicking the piece of grandstand that had pinned him. "Cloaks of the ancients, what the hell was that?! He cast a Patronus! How the hell did he do that?"

Katie came to a halt as she stared at her boyfriend. His right eye was no longer glowing and it was obvious some of the facial and jaw bones had broken. In his left hand he held his right arm; the impact with the grandstand had sheared the limb off at the shoulder. He strode purposefully towards McGonagall and nudged her aside before shouting in Draco Malfoy's face. "You idiot, do you know what you cost us?" He pointed the bloodied end of the severed limb at the each one of the culprits, who were now turning interesting shades of green. "I'll kill you all! I'll eat your souls and rip your heads off!"

To drive the point home, he retook his Dementor form and made a horrible sucking sound. The Slytherins ran screaming, followed by an amused McGonagall. When Esdras took mortal form again he sighed and looked around. Katie approached him slowly and wrapped her arms around him. She was careful to avoid the stump which had stopped bleeding and started to glow silver during his rant. "Are you okay?"

The Dementor sighed and shook his head. "We lost, and I am...was right handed. It's going to take a few days to grow this back." He regarded the severed limb and tossed it into the pile with the rest of the wreckage. "We were so close." By this time the rest of the Gryffindors had gathered around in order to watch the Slytherins face

both the Dementor's and McGonagall's wrath. Esdras sighed and untied the arms of his robes from around his waist, trying to slip back into the garment. Katie ended up having to help him get it on and button it up. Esdras looked through the faces in the crowd to find Harry. He smirked before offering his left hand. "Not bad, for a mortal."

Chapter 19 – Black Attack

Esdras leaned back as Madame Pomfrey finished wrapping the slowly healing arm socket in gauze. The broken bones in his face and resulting soft tissue damage had already healed by the time he got back to the Hospital Wing. Professor Lupin had cast a Patronus for him, so the Dementor was feeling quite comfortable, especially since Katie was holding his hand. The nurse looked up after tucking the loose ends of the gauze into the bandage and smiled. “That should hold you until tomorrow, but come back if it feels uncomfortable and I’ll change the bandage. I want to keep this wrapped up until it has healed all the way.”

The Dementor rose and nodded. “Yes, ma’am. But you really don’t have to worry, I’ve lost arms before.” He walked out of the Hospital Wing, with Katie at his side. “And legs on a few occasions, and then there was that time with my head. You’d have to ask Aaron about that, I don’t remember it, obviously.”

Katie laughed and leaned against his good arm. She cast a concerned glance in his direction. “Should you be in your animagus form? Don’t you need to conserve energy while you’re healing?”

Esdras shrugged it off and patted his lower abdomen. “I’ll be fine. I’ve got enough in reserves that I can do both for a while.” They walked together to the Ravenclaw common room. As a mark of solidarity, the suit of armor guarding the door had removed his right arm. The pair laughed softly. “Here’s where I leave you, darling. You know, I really should be walking you to your common room.”

She laughed softly. “You’re injured.” Brushing a strand of blonde hair from her eyes, Katie looked down at her feet for a second. “I know you didn’t win, but we’re having a bit of a celebration and I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind coming with me, just for a bit. If you don’t want to you don’t have to. I’d just, well, I’d like it if you were there with me.”

The Dementor smiled and nodded. “Sure, but I can’t stay long. Someone lost today, you know. Just let me get something from my room first.” He leaned in and whispered the password to the suit of armor before it stepped aside and let him in. He was gone for only a

few minutes before he returned with a satchel that clinked with the sound of glass bottles. "Something for you to toast your victory with."

She nodded happily and took his hand again, walking with him to the portrait hole of the Gryffindor common room. Even through the painting, one could hear the festivities going on within. Even Sir Cadogan seemed to be enjoying himself. "Aha! The fair lady chaser who is dearest to my heart. I will gladly allow you access if you will grant me the password and thy favor."

The Dementor blinked at this and presented his badge. "That's my girlfriend, canvas boy. Azkaban Guard, open up."

Any sense of revelry was quickly abandoned by the knight as both he and his horse jolted. He tried valiantly to steady the steed. "As you wish, sir."

The painting swung aside and the volume of the party increased tenfold. Cheers erupted as Katie entered and they continued as Esdras followed behind her. Fred and George were the first to make their way to him, handing him a bottle of butterbeer. Katie had to hold the bottle while the twins shook his hand firmly. "Well played out there, my friend."

George nodded and continued. "Definitely. I liked the flames, they were a nice touch. But what on earth was that about, anyway?"

The black cloaked presence had garnered Harry's attention, as well. "Yes, Esdras. What was that? I had no idea you could fly that fast."

Esdras smiled. "It's a fairly common Dementor spell, the afterburner. It's so common that our cloaks are designed to allow for its use. It gives us the ability to burn pure ichor in the vent of the float bladder. A Dementor's top speed is about fifty miles per hour and each afterburner increases top speed by fifty miles per hour. You can run with any number of float bladders in afterburner mode, but with all eight lit, top speed increases to about four hundred fifty miles per hour."

Hermione paled. "That's over half the speed of sound."

Esdras nodded happily. "However, there are disadvantages to it. You use energy at an accelerated rate. Full afterburner uses ichor about five times as fast as normal flight, but considering the speed, it's worth it. We use it in emergencies when we have to get to places in a hurry, usually after major accidents where the feeding is good." This caused some uncomfortable looks from those around him. "Or we use it when we have to get to Azkaban and the wind is strong."

The conversation for the next half hour involved the match entirely. Esdras smiled politely as Harry recounted how he got the Snitch, but still drained the entire bottle of butterbeer he was holding at the end. He knew he shouldn't stay too long, so after that story he stood up and collected his satchel. "Well guys, congratulations on winning, and as a bit of a show of good faith, I brought you something special."

He began to pass out the bottles that were in the satchel. Katie smiled happily and addressed her teammates. "Mint beer! I've had it before, it's very good but just a little strong."

Esdras nodded. "You'll like it I hope. It's the white label, it's the weakest kind made."

The seven members of the Gryffindor Quidditch team uncorked their bottles and raised them up, all drinking together. The result was unexpected, as each person dropped their bottle and began coughing, Oliver even spat his back up. In the confusion, the Dementor had moved to a window and opened it up. Standing on the ledge and laughing madly, he called out to the assembled crowd. "Ravenclaw forever!" And then he floated out into the evening.

Katie coughed again and picked up the bottle. "I don't understand, I had this stuff when I visited Azkaban. It didn't taste like this, it wasn't anywhere near as strong." She inspected the label and saw a side of it was peeling off. She pulled the label off and saw another one beneath it, a black label. She growled in frustration and ran to the open window. "Esdras Tarsus Demnin, you get back here!" When he didn't return, she sighed and poured the insanely strong mint beverage out the window with a hint of a smile on her face. "Goodness knows why I love him."

The charge of consorting with the enemy was quickly dropped by the Ravenclaw jury after Esdras recounted the effect of the black label mint beer on the Gryffindor team. The only laughter to fill the room that day came when he imitated Oliver Wood's reaction to the beverage. So happy were they for their moment of levity, that the whole of Ravenclaw house formed a protective shield around Esdras as they made their way to dinner, in the event of any retaliatory actions. They didn't have to worry, Gryffindor was so caught up in the celebration that all memory of the beer attack had been long since forgotten.

Britten looked over at the Gryffindor table and sighed, causing Cecilia to gently rub him on the back. "Look at them. They won because of some stupid spell."

Bradley put a hand to his ear and raised his voice sarcastically. "What was that? I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the sound of how awesome they are."

Esdras merely tried to calm down his teammates. "Come on, guys. Let them rest on their laurels tonight. If we had won, we would have won because of some stupid spell, too."

Britten grumbled miserably. "Your spell wasn't stupid. You shot flames out of your back. Where I come from, that's pretty awesome."

Before too much longer, they all decided to retire back to the common room. No one was particularly hungry after the events of the day, not even the usually ravenous Dementor. When they were all safely enclosed in the common room, Esdras sighed and made for the dorm stairs. "I'm tired, and this thing will heal better if I sleep." He turned and regarded the team again. "We did really well today, no matter what the outcome was."

Six half smiles met him. Cho called out softly. "Good night, Esdras."

The Dementor retired to his comfortable bedroom and changed from his robes and cloak to pajamas. After his evening ablutions, he floated quietly to his bed, flopped into it, and quietly grumbled his prayers to the Azkaban deities, all of whom he was rather annoyed

with at the moment. It would be a while before he would fall asleep, taking his natural form as he relaxed.

It was late at night when Esdras was shaken awake. Never a creature to be startled, the Dementor quickly lashed out, grabbing the assailant by the head and lifting them into the air. It was only when he realized how small the form was that he figured out that he had grabbed Professor Flitwick. Esdras promptly released him and began apologizing profusely. He was cut off quickly by the urgent whispers of the teacher. "You must come with me. There has been another break in by Sirius Black."

The Dementor cursed wildly in Azkabaan before grabbing his cloak and the professor in his only available hand. He took flight down the stairwell and plowed through the door to the common room. "Where, when? What happened?"

Professor Flitwick let out a nervous squeak and pointed down the hall. "In the Gryffindor common room, just a few minutes ago. Ron Weasley said he saw him standing over his bed."

Esdras tensed and the shrieking roar of the afterburners cut in, burning away the back of his pajama shirt and propelling them down the hall at incredible speed. The noise was enough to wake every painting they flew by, or at least those that weren't awakened already by the news of the intrusion. One question was on his mind, he shouted to be heard over the roar. "Katie?"

The professor nodded, his eyes now closed. "She's fine. Just Ron saw him."

The flight was quick and they arrived at the crowd assembled in front of the Gryffindor portrait hole in record time. Esdras pulled off the charred remnants of his shirt and put his cloak over his shoulders. Professor Flitwick, taking mercy on his condition, cast a charm that closed the clasp for him.

The Dementor towered behind McGonagall as she questioned Sir Cadogan on the events of the night. "Did you let anyone at all into the common room?"

The knight spoke proudly. "Of course, the gentleman had the password written on a piece of paper. In fact, he had a whole list of them."

McGonagall looked confused. "How on earth could Sirius Black have a list of all the passwords for the common room?"

A nervous voice spoke up from the back of the crowd. "I think I know, Professor." Neville Longbottom stepped forward, looking paler than most of the ghosts that frequented the halls. "I couldn't keep track of the password, it was changed so often. So I made a list of them so that I wouldn't have to remember. But I lost the list."

The Dementor let out a low growl and floated to the terrified boy. He grabbed him by the head and lifted him into the air, taking his natural form and roaring in anger. "You idiot! You intentionally endangered yourself, your housemates, and my girlfriend because you can't keep track of a password?"

The rant would have continued, but a slender form gently placed her hand on the empty socket of the Dementor's right arm. "Esdras, it's alright. We're safe this time. Put Neville down."

The Dementor held Neville for a second longer, staring him in the eye through his hood. Finally he took up his animagus form and lowered Neville to the ground, releasing him into a pile. "The professors will deal with you. I will deal with Black."

Neville backed away as quickly as he could, stammering his understanding. He backed into McGonagall, who glared sternly at him. "We'll deal with you tomorrow."

Esdras, meanwhile, had approached Sir Cadogan and was glaring into the oil painting. "And as for you, you flirt constantly with my girlfriend and recklessly endanger her because you can't recognize the face of a prisoner in his late thirties from a student in his early teens. I question your competence."

He raised his left hand and calmly flicked the canvas. Inside the portrait, the knight was thrown from his horse and fell a good twenty feet away with a resounding clatter of armor. The Dementor rose

stiffly and again felt a gentle touch on his arm. Katie slowly flipped back the cloak and shivered. The bandaged socket had stopped glowing and the depression that was contained within his charmed cloak meant that Esdras was passively feeding. She turned to face Professor McGonagall and spoke calmly, considering the circumstances. "Esdras is not well; let me take him to the Hospital Wing."

Esdras shrugged his cloak closed and waved off her concern. "I'll be fine. We really should search for Black before the trail goes cold."

To this statement, a calm voice came from behind them. "You are correct, Captain Demnin, but you are in no condition to lead that search." Dumbledore walked calmly into the candlelight with the floating form of Aaron Reaping beside him. "I took the liberty of sending for the commander since you are presently injured."

The commander saluted his commanding officer. "*Requesting permission to begin search, sir.*"

The captain glared quietly from the headmaster to his friend. Letting out a low growl, he acquiesced. "*The hunt is yours, commander.*"

Esdras spun on his heel and took to the air, floating down the hall towards the stairwell that would take him to the Hospital Wing. He heard soft footsteps following him. It was no surprise when Katie came along beside him. "Dumbledore said I should walk you down."

Green eyes flashed in the candlelit darkness. "Because I'm injured? Or is it because I can't do my job? This is the second time he's gotten in here, and where have I been? I was in the library once and I was asleep this time. I haven't been paying attention to my duties. This mortal form has made me soft. Everything about this place has made me soft."

Katie stopped, the staircase was absent. She smiled softly in the candlelight. "Everything?"

The Dementor glared and floated out over the stairwell. "Everything."

Esdras Demnin fell into the night.

Chapter 20 – Third Hogsmeade

The change was almost eerie. Thanks to the availability of Patronus energy, it had taken a little under three days for Esdras to regenerate his missing limb and in that time he had transformed from just one of the guys to the poster child for the Azkaban Guard Command. He no longer took meals with his housemates, opting instead to keep watch from the rafters where his cloaked body was hidden in the magical cloud cover. Aaron made mention to Katie that patrol shifts had doubled, and no requests for leave were being granted.

When the captain was not working on homework, he would take guard duty shifts at the Gryffindor portrait hole, platinum Glaive resting loosely against his shoulder. It was more likely to see the Fat Lady being guarded by a Dementor than the trolls that had originally been brought in for the job. Esdras had made a number of friends in his months and Hogwarts. They would stop to say hello and he would dismiss them with the same echoing reply. “Move along.”

The day of the third Hogsmeade visit had dawned, and Katie found herself at breakfast, staring glumly at her eggs. She looked across to Alicia and sighed. “Is it possible for a Dementor to feel inadequate?”

Alicia smirked. “He’s a guy. I don’t think it has anything to do with him being a Dementor.”

The blonde pushed her plate away and stood up. “That’s it, I’m going to talk to Aaron. Maybe he can knock some sense into Esdras.”

Katie walked down to the gate and regarded the two Dementors on the other side. They were not members of the Thirteenth Infantry, so she cleared her throat and tried her luck with Azkabaaner. “*Excuse me, I would like to speak with Commander Aaron Reaping. Please summon him for me.*”

The Dementors knew well of the mortal that the captain of the Thirteenth Infantry was involved with. One of the lieutenants bowed politely. “*Yes, ma’am. Please wait here.*”

The Dementor floated quickly over the lake and disappeared into the distance. A few minutes later, it returned the way it came with another

cloaked figure trailing behind. As they approached, Aaron waved to his friend and floated to the other side of the gate. "Katie, what can I do for you?"

Katie sighed. "It's Esdras. He's driving me crazy and I need to figure out a way to get his head out of his dorsal vent."

Aaron doubled over in laughter and was a long time in stopping. It was a minute before he looked up and saw the serious expression on her face. He slowly sobered up and took a deep breath. "Look at what he's been through. He lost an arm and as a result was unable to stop Sirius Black from entering the school. Esdras knows how deeply we sleep when healing major injuries. And there's no telling if he would have been able to stop Black even if he weren't in a healing sleep. He's being hard on himself, even though this is something that the Admiralty understands and accepts. He's the first Dementor in a long time to be able to walk among the mortals. He wants to prove himself able to successfully be both."

Katie sighed and looked out over the lake as she thought this over. "I think I know what to do."

The Dementor nodded. "Good, and if you can get us off the double shifts, that would be great, too." He floated back up over the gate. "He cares for you deeply, you know."

Katie nodded and waved as Aaron floated back over the lake.

Esdras stood motionless across from the portrait hole. He had relieved the troll that had originally been scheduled and was hovering near the ceiling, watching the hallway for anything out of the ordinary. He watched as Katie walked below him and into the common room. It hurt to do this to her, but it was necessary for the continued success of the mission. But he really did want to go to Hogsmeade with her.

Katie was only in the dormitory for a few minutes, but when she reemerged she looked like a whole new woman. She was wearing a tight black sweater and a knee length skirt. Her hair was up, held in place by the fire emerald hair clips that she had been given for Christmas, the fire emerald necklace graced her neck. She had

applied light make up and a gentle perfume. She was beautiful. She looked up to the Dementor in the corner and smiled softly. "Captain Demnin, if you please, I require your assistance."

He sighed quietly and looked away from the sight before him. "Move along."

Her voice took on a more plaintive quality. "Please, captain, I must beg you for your help. I fear that Sirius Black will attack me when I go to Hogsmeade. I would like your protection."

The Dementor regarded her for a moment before floating to the ground and taking mortal form. He pulled his hood back and looked at her with bored green eyes. "This whole damsel in distress thing isn't you. I'm not going to Hogsmeade, I'm needed here."

Katie fumed and crossed her arms in front of her. Whether or not she was actively trying to accentuate her features, Esdras never knew. "And this whole emotionless stone thing isn't you, either. You're a Dementor and a guard, but no one expects you to be the next incarnation of Merlin or whoever the Azkaban equivalent would be. Now quit thinking you are." She grasped him by the collar and pulled him down, kissing him hard and pushing him into the wall. She finally broke away and smirked at him. "Now go get ready while I change, I'll meet you downstairs in ten minutes."

Esdras looked curiously at her. "You're not going out like that?"

She smiled playfully. "I'm not wearing the fire emeralds out. Otherwise, everything else is the same."

The Dementor smiled and floated off down the hall as Katie reentered the portrait hole. A minute later the portal reopened to reveal the resident team seeker. Harry Potter looked down the hallway in both directions and chuckled softly at his good fortune. He shouldered the bag that contained his invisibility cloak. "Thank you, Katie."

It hadn't taken long for Esdras to calm down after being called on his excess. As the happy couple walked through the gates and down towards Hogsmeade, Esdras called aside one of the guards at the

gate and granted a holiday leave that he had previously denied. Word would quickly spread through the Dementor camp that the real Captain Demnin was back.

So it was that they found their way to Hogsmeade and, like any other student couple, completely wasted their day window shopping, eating unhealthy snacks, and hanging around the Three Broomsticks. They had just come from said establishment after a large lunch, since neither had eaten a very substantial breakfast, and walked slowly down the High Street.

The Dementor turned to face the mortal. "So I really have been a bit of a git, haven't I?"

Katie smiled. "I'm just glad you got your head out of your dorsal vent before I had to resort to more drastic measures."

Esdras shook his head slowly. "I knew letting Hermione see the Dementor Medical Reference would be a bad idea. Look at what I've created."

She linked arms with him and leaned against his shoulder. "You've created the start of a new understanding about Dementors. Some of us mortals are even starting to not fear you, and a lot more are beginning to tolerate and accept you. And as a mortal, well, I haven't snogged many other guys, but you are definitely at the top of my list."

The Dementor arched a glowing eye and gazed down at her. "Thank you?"

But the mortal was distracted. "Oooh, look at that dress in Gladrag's."

Esdras was pulled so quickly that he took to the air, floating along behind her to gaze at the garment in the window. However, his attention was distracted by a commotion coming from farther up the High Street. Looking in that direction, he could see none other than a cloaked Harry Potter running from Draco Malfoy. It didn't take three hundred years of knowledge to tell him that somehow Malfoy had caught sight of Harry and was intent on spilling the secret.

So Esdras did the only thing he could think of. After Harry passed by, Esdras swept out into the path of the oncoming Slytherin and drew himself up to his full Dementor height and pulled his hood back. "Dement!"

Malfoy screamed and backpedaled, running back the way he came. Esdras knew that the determined mortal would still make his way back to Hogwarts, but hopefully he had bought Harry some time. Katie approached him as he took mortal form and looked curiously at him. "What was that all about?"

The Dementor shrugged. "Just doing a friend a favor. Want to get a closer look at that dress?"

Katie didn't inquire further, but nodded and took his hand. After a moment, she looked at him curiously. "Dement?"

The Dementor grinned.

The return to Hogwarts was wonderful. The weather was perfect and the setting sun cast a thousand colors on the evening sky. The pair, mortal and Dementor, walked quietly to the castle gates, returned the salutes of the guards, and wandered through the Entrance Hall straight to the Great Hall where dinner was being served. Esdras followed Katie to the Gryffindor table. At her confused look, he merely smiled. "I wanted to have a word with Harry about something."

She smiled and led on, taking a seat next to Alicia and Angelina. Esdras continued down the table until he came to Harry and tapped him on the shoulder. The young wizard did a double take when he turned around. "Oh, hello Esdras, how are you?"

The Dementor nodded. "Fine, just fine. Can I talk to you for a second?"

When Harry nodded his assent, Esdras grabbed him by the front of his robes and bolted up towards the ceiling, coming to rest atop a rafter hidden in the magical cloud cover of the roof. He spoke in a low, intense whisper. "Do you see now why I didn't want you going into town? You're just lucky that it wasn't a Dementor who found you or

you'd be sitting in St. Mungo's without a soul. Now did you get back here in time?"

The wizard nodded. "Yes, barely. Snape found me right as I was coming out of the tunnel. It was close. Thank you for distracting Malfoy."

The Dementor waved aside his gratitude. "Feh. You're still a fool, and I should have anticipated that you wouldn't have listened to me. But, what's done is done. At least there are no more Hogsmeade visits."

Having said his peace, Esdras tipped backwards, taking Harry on a gentle descent back towards the Gryffindor table. After dropping him off, he floated over to the Ravenclaw table and sat down next to his team, offering them a sheepish smile. Cho looked idly up at him. "So, you're back?"

Esdras nodded. "I'm back. I'm sorry I was such a git."

The team nodded quietly and carefully considered him. Britten spoke up. "And the arm's alright?"

The Dementor smiled, flexing his right arm and making a fist. "Good as new."

His fellow beater nodded. "Good, because we're going to take those Gryffindors out next year, and we'll need you to do it."

The rest of the team cheered at this statement. Team Ravenclaw was back in action.

Chapter 21 – Gryffindor vs. Slytherin

Esdras really didn't have the heart to tell his team that most likely, with the capture of Sirius Black, both he and his division would be reassigned to Azkaban. As much fun as it was being a mortal, he would be unable to escape the fact that he wasn't one. The worst part was when he realized that he would have to break up with Katie. When he realized that, he put down his potions textbook and went off for a float around the lake. He would be useless studying for a while.

The float around the lake was eventful. As he banked over the shore where the Dementor command bunker was, he caught sight of a familiar cloak and called down. *"Hello there, Aaron."*

The commander spun about and looked up, offering a casual salute. *"Captain, to what do we owe the pleasure?"*

The commander of operations for the Hogsmeade region sighed heavily, his hood hanging limply over his face. *"Aaron, what am I?"*

The Dementor looked up at his friend for a second, then quickly waved his hands in front of him. *"Oh no, Esdras. Not this. You're not dragging me into a philosophical argument about the nature of mortal-Dementor relationships and your place in that argument as a result of being able to be both."*

The captain looked at his friend with a wide hood. *"How did you know I was going to ask that?"*

Aaron laughed lightly. *"I've been your friend for almost two centuries now, Esdras. You were best man at my wedding; you're godfather to my sister and children. You're like a brother to me. You should be worried if I don't know what you're thinking."*

Esdras growled at him and grabbed a large rock from the shore of the lake, tossing it halfway out into the lake. *"Fact remains, I'm a Dementor, and she's a mortal. And when we catch chi psi three nine zero, we're going to be recalled to Azkaban and I'll most likely never see her again."*

The commander made a dismissive motion as he picked up a rock as well and tossed it. *"Now you're being fatalistic. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be. Remember when we got stationed in Poland and I thought we'd be stuck there forever and I'd never see Christine again?"*

The captain laughed. *"You were such a child about that, all because of some silly little mortal war. But, I see your point."* He sighed and tossed another rock into the lake. *"I don't know, I just don't think it's fair on her."*

Aaron nodded slowly and looked out over the rippling water. *"Fair or not, the choice of who she wishes to become involved with is hers to make. You know as well as I do that a relationship between a Dementor and mortal is possible, so don't close yourself off to the idea simply because distance may get in the way."*

Esdras bowed his head. "Yes, you're right about that. And if this is what she wants, she'll do anything to get it." His gaze drifted to the quickly stilling water. *"And if it's meant to be, it's meant to be. But that scares me, Aaron."*

The commander nodded and cuffed his commanding officer on the back. *"Fear is part of living life. The only question is in how you manage the fear that comes your way. Now come on, I was looking through the Hogwarts student files and there's something you need to see."*

It was a few days before the last Quidditch match of the season, and by now most of the students had gotten used to the random vulture flying in with post from Azkaban for Esdras. However, when the vulture that flew in on this day turned to make a run down the Gryffindor table, people paid attention.

Katie was already digging through a large stack of mail this day, but she looked up just in time to grab the letter. Translating the Azkabaaner writing, she determined the return address to be from the Reaping residence, North Mountain, Azkaban. Alicia looked over at the letter with strange print and arched an eyebrow. "Birthday cards from everyone?"

Katie nodded and opened the foreign post first. "The Reapings are very nice. It's easy to see why Esdras is such close friends with them."

The contents of the letter turned out to be a very nice mortal birthday card, signed by Christine, Jacob, Calla, and Sasha, four stones, a crayon rendition of the North Mountain mint fields by Jacob, and a finger painted...something...by Calla. Alicia looked at the paintings while Katie read the note written on the inside of the card. "Well, the Reaping children are quite the artists, aren't they?"

Katie laughed as she got to a particular part of the missive. "And apparently, Christine is still cleaning finger paints off the walls from Calla's first attempt at painting."

Angelina leaned across the table and smiled slyly. "What do you think Esdras got you?"

Katie shrugged and indicated the four stones resting near her goblet. "Most likely a small stone, it's a traditional Azkaban gift. It serves to remind them that they are not completely immortal and will fade away, unlike the stone."

Angelina looked rather put off. "That's a bit of a downer on your birthday."

The blonde smiled. "They don't think of birthdays the same way we do."

Her concept of how Dementors viewed birthdays was turned on its ear, however, when the cloaked form of Aaron Reaping floated cautiously into the Great Hall. It looked like he was trying to blend in, but being nine feet tall and cloaked black as pitch, he was succeeding about as well as Hagrid in a Doxy nest. The Dementor carried a carefully wrapped box and glided silently down the aisle. When he got to her, he bowed politely and held out the present. Atop the box rested a small stone. "Happy birthday, Katie."

She took the gift and smiled brightly at the Dementor. "Thank you, Aaron. You didn't have to."

The Dementor waved aside her concern. "Nonsense, I wanted to. Anyway, I have to go give Esdras the day's duty rosters before he thinks I'm abusing my castle privilege."

Katie giggled softly and pointed behind him. "Too late."

Sure enough, when Aaron turned around, there stood Esdras, standing hood to hood with him. "And why would I think you're abusing your castle privilege, Aaron?"

The commander's voice was amused. "Very funny, sir." He handed off a sheaf of parchment. "Today's duty roster, the Eighth and Ninety First infantries are on perimeter patrol, Seventy Seventh is on roaming patrol, and we've got the gates today."

The captain reviewed the documents and conjured a quill and inkwell, signing his name where necessary. "Very good, commander. Just try not to show me up next year, I still haven't given Katie her gift yet."

Aaron snapped to attention and saluted. "Yes, sir."

Esdras returned his salute. "Dismissed, commander." As the commander floated off, Esdras again took his mortal form and stuffed the rosters into his cloak. He sighed. "I thought being a captain would be fun, instead it's just paperwork."

Katie nodded and moved over on the bench to make room for him. Once the Dementor had sat down, she leaned against him and spoke anxiously. "So, what's this I hear about a birthday present?"

The Dementor shrugged and reached into his cloak, pulling out a small stone. "*The stone is permanent, mortal child, it changes not from year to year.*"

Katie nodded and took the stone, repeating the necessary line. "But we are not the stone, child of Azkaban, our time is measured by the sand instead." She palmed the smooth stone and hugged Esdras tightly. And as she hugged him, she felt something crinkle beneath his cloak. She pulled back with a questioning look on her face.

Esdras smiled, and withdrew a large, flat package. Katie laughed and tore into the paper. When she finally opened the box, she gasped to see the same dress that she had been staring at in the window of Gladrag's at the last Hogsmeade trip. She looked over to her boyfriend who simply shrugged. "Hey, you did the Dementor thing and now you're going to do the mortal thing. Happy birthday, darling."

Esdras walked with his teammates towards the Quidditch pitch. "Remind me again why the Gryffindor-Slytherin game got postponed to the last game of the season?"

Cho sighed. "Because according to Marietta who heard it from Padma who heard it from Parvati who was actually there, earlier this year Draco was a git to a hippogriff and got his arm sliced open. He played up the injury, so that game got moved back and all the other ones got moved up."

The Dementor smirked and glided up the stairs. "Funny how that works out. If he hadn't played up the injury, they'd have a better chance since Harry would still be riding his Nimbus 2000."

Roger laughed and looked back at the two. "Yeah, karma is a bi...good morning, Professor Flitwick." The diminutive professor squeaked his greeting and made his way past the students. Roger let out a sigh of relief. "That was close."

Chambers decided to raise another interesting point. "And why is it that all our information comes fourth or fifth hand, anyway? Nothing exciting ever happens to us, like with that whole Chamber of Secrets thing last year."

Cho shrugged. "We're just not important enough."

Esdras looked hopeful. "I'm a Dementor."

Cho shook her head. "Not important enough."

The Dementor grumbled. "I'm important enough. It's not like anyone would want to write a book about Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets or anything. And besides, who would read it?"

The Ravenclaws shrugged in response and took their seats and waited for the start of the game. Esdras had his cobalt glasses on and was waiting for the start of the action. Lee Jordan had already dutifully announced the Slytherin team, whose entry onto the pitch was accompanied by much booing and a strange hiss from the Dementor. Finally, the Gryffindor team was announced and the stadium echoed with the roar of the crowd. Esdras cheered loudly and waved around a small sign that read, in Azkabaaner, "*Death to the opposition.*"

The game was, in a word, brutal. With the Slytherin team putting up a dirty fight in order to secure the championship, Gryffindor was fighting for every point and paying the price. Down in the Ravenclaw stands, the result was the other six members of the Quidditch team, plus a few others, actively holding Esdras down every time a Slytherin got close to Katie.

The final straw came when Montague took Katie's head in his arm instead of the Quaffle. The Dementor burst free from his mortal shackles and into the air, emitting a strange, amplified keening wail that switched midway through to a mortal scream. All action on the field slowed momentarily as the floating Dementor glared icily at the Slytherin chaser. Montague carefully released Katie from the headlock and visibly gulped as he was stared down from one hundred feet away.

The Dementor remained hovering in midair, arms crossed, as the action on the pitch resumed. Finally, he saw fit to descend to his seat, his point made. Cho sat silently beside him for a moment. "You realize what she's going to say to you after the match is over, right?"

Esdras smirked and adopted an irritated Katie tone...

"Esdras Tarsus Demnin, what do you think you were doing out there? I'll have you know I can take care of myself on the pitch without your help."

The Dementor laughed inwardly as Chambers slapped his forehead. The poor mortal now owed him ten Sickles. Katie glared at the

Dementor for a moment more before breaking out into a grin and jumping into his arms, cheering loudly. "We won! We won the cup!"

The Dementor laughed with her and spun her around in a tight circle before kissing her deeply. "Congratulations! You were wonderful out there. How's your neck?"

Caught in the moment, Katie answered truthfully. "It's still a little sore but..." She caught herself and cuffed the Dementor on the shoulder. "It's fine. No need to worry."

Esdras shook his head slightly. "Not so fast. Five minutes with Madame Pomfrey, then we can party the night away. Deal?"

Katie made a show of contemplating the proposition. "Well, I suppose I wouldn't want to be encumbered in any way." She leaned in dangerously close. The smell of dirt and dragon leather was almost intoxicating. "Especially if you're going to be there."

The Dementor nodded, not trusting his voice, and wrapped his arms around her before kicking off and floating them both towards the castle. The trip to the Hospital Wing took less than five minutes, and the treatment by a bemused Madame Pomfrey took less than that. She smiled to the chaser as she tapped the back of her neck with her wand. "Well, certainly not life threatening, but you would have been sore in the morning if you hadn't gotten this taken care of."

The ministrations complete, Katie put her hand to the back of her neck and rubbed before smiling. Esdras was hovering around the chandelier in the hallways outside the Hospital Wing. "Dementors take great care in watching after the health of their friends and loved ones. Sickness and lingering injury are so rare among them that they will wait hand and foot after someone for as little as a cough."

The nurse smiled and sent Katie on her way with a clean bill of health and a piece of advice. "My dear, I don't think that's the reason why he looks after you like he does."

Katie left the Hospital Wing with a blush. Esdras floated down and joined her. Noting the color on her cheeks he cast a quizzical glance.

“What?” She smiled and walked ahead a little faster, the Dementor trailing after. “What, did I miss something? Katie...?”

Chapter 22 – Strike Force

Exams were finally over. Snape had seen fit to inflict every sort of damage imaginable on the potions final. The fourth year Ravensclaws sat in one of the many courtyards of the school, unable to string together coherent thoughts. Even Esdras bore the marks of fatigue. He floated limply in midair, as a mortal in the water would. The calm wind would occasionally catch him and drift him towards a wall.

Cho looked up and spoke out to her floating friend. “Esdras, wall.”

The Dementor rolled his head to take note of the obstruction he was approaching before floating away from it and back to his housemates. He returned to a low hover near the bench they had claimed. “*My brain feels like a custard.*”

Roger swatted at the Dementor, causing him to float away again. “Speak English, man.”

Cho groaned and tried to stand up. “He may as well speak Azkabaaner, for all I know that exam was written in it.” She addressed the still floating form using the little Azkabaaner she knew. “*Esdras, come. It is dinnertime.*”

The Dementor slowly righted himself and came to a rest on unstable feet. He walked back over to his friends and sighed heavily. “Snape should be in a maximum security cell on Azkaban. That was like a Cruciatus Curse on paper.”

The others muttered their assent as they walked through the halls of Hogwarts to the Great Hall for dinner. Along the way they were met by the overly exuberant Katie Bell. She looked at them curiously. “Why the long faces?”

Esdras blinked and smiled condescendingly. “We just spent three lovely hours with Severus. Who put the cheering charm in your underwear?”

Katie smiled and slipped an arm around her boyfriend. “Oh, just spent three lovely hours with Rubeus. I think it went rather well, personally.”

The Dementor glared and spoke with a low, gravelly voice. "I hate you."

Katie just smiled and kissed him on the nose. She leaned in conspiratorially as they entered the Great Hall and whispered softly into his ear. "Don't worry, I'll make sure you forget all about Snape after dinner."

Before the stunned Esdras could say anything, she was off to the Gryffindor table. He followed her swaying hips until she sat down then shook his head slightly, feeling a bit more awake. Cho nudged him and smirked. "Alright there, Esdras?" The Dementor's eye glowed brightly. Cho laughed. "I guess that's a yes."

Dinner proved to be just the recuperative event that the school needed. The mentally battered mass of students slowly began to perk up as the meal progressed, and by dessert the uproar in the Great Hall was approaching normal levels. All were beginning to feel much improved, and even the professors were looking a bit more relaxed, a sign of the impending close of the school year.

As the meal wound to a close, Esdras floated slowly out of the Great Hall. Once he was clear of the tall doors, he was pulled forcefully by the cloak. The blonde form that was pulling him was easily identifiable. "Hello to you, too, Katie."

She turned, brown eyes shining with an emotion that Esdras couldn't quite place. She looked him in the eye and stepped close, wrapping her arms tightly around him. "Up. Third floor."

Esdras looked up, they were near the stairwell. He shrugged lightly and lifted off the ground, floating lazily up the empty space until he came to rest at the third floor. Katie again grabbed him by the cloak and pulled him along. Used to this by now, Esdras simply floated. "Want to tell me where we're going?"

He was met with silence and shrugged. Floating along behind the determined Gryffindor, the Ravenclaw watched as the columns passed by. He was almost getting bored when Katie took a quick right and pulled him into a room lined with gleaming crystal display cases.

She smiled. "The Trophy Room, it's not exactly regularly visited by students. I thought we could have a little privacy here."

The Dementor looked around, taking in the many gleaming awards of days long past and nodded. His voice was innocent. "Why would we need privacy?" He looked into Katie's eyes and suddenly the emotion in her eyes was quite easy to place, lust. His eyes widened and he smiled playfully. "Oh."

Katie closed the distance between them and reached up, running her hand through the hair on the back of his head. "Exactly." She kicked backwards and the pair was rewarded with the soft click of the door shutting, then she pulled the Dementor in.

Time is a relative thing. What had seemed like only a precious few minutes to the couple happily snogging away in the Trophy Room had in fact been a good solid hour. So it came as a surprise when the door to the Trophy Room burst open. Esdras whipped around quickly and pointed his wand at the door. He lowered it just as quickly, for standing in the door was a nine foot form, its head averted. Aaron Reaping spoke up quickly. "Sorry, Esdras. Sorry."

Esdras clutched his chest and sighed. "Cloaks of the ancients, Aaron, that just made my heart beat." Behind him, he could hear Katie rapidly trying to readjust her shirt. He billowed out his cloak as best as he could and growled. "Report, commander. I assume there's a reason for this?"

Aaron turned and snapped to a salute. "Yes, sir. Something big is going down, Esdras. Malachi was on patrol approximately fifteen minutes ago and noticed students Potter and Granger proceeding into a hole at the base of the Whomping Willow. The next one is more disturbing; Lieutenant Sectus of the Seventy Seventh reported hearing Potter directly address Sirius Black in the Shrieking Shack only five minutes ago. I ordered all troops into assault cloaks and rushed here immediately to find you, some of the portraits told me you were in this room. I had no idea..."

Esdras held his hand up. "Shut up, Aaron." He turned to Katie, who was now looking presentable. "You know I have to do this."

She smiled and nodded before giving him another smoldering kiss. "Go get the bad guy."

The captain turned to face his commander. "Do you have my assault cloak?"

The commander conjured a satchel and pulled out two cloaks, he tossed one to Esdras. The assault cloak was long, black, and, judging from the temperature drop in the room, obviously not a mark thirteen. It had a padded chest region for added protection and a more streamlined hood than a regular cloak. The Dementors attached their guard badges to the front of the cloaks and secured their rank insignia on the shoulders.

Esdras then touched the side of his hood where an embedded communication charm was located and spoke. *"All troops, this is Captain Esdras Demnin, we are at defense condition one. Seventy Seventh and Eighth Infantries, surround the Shrieking Shack and be prepared to move against anything that comes from it. Thirteenth and Ninety First infantries, surround the Whomping Willow and wait for my arrival."*

His hood echoed softly with the affirmative replies of the three division commanders and Malachi, who was in temporary command of the Thirteenth Infantry. He turned again to face Katie. "Go to the common room. Tell no one about this, the last thing I need is a panic among the students."

Katie nodded and rushed from the Trophy Room as the Dementors took off in the opposite direction towards the nearest window.

Esdras waited calmly in the woods near the Whomping Willow, listening to the chatter coming through his hood. Captains Stone and Maul were both capable officers, but Black was a wily adversary. Sure enough, Stone's voice came through the communications hood. *"Captain Demnin, we were hearing voices from the cabin up until a few minutes ago but it has gone pretty silent now."*

Mulling his options for a moment, Esdras sighed. *"There are civilians in there. Launch a full assault, stun anything that moves."*

The reply was immediate. “Yes, *sir*.” The next few seconds consisted of the sound of shattering wood, and shouts in Azkabaaner and Pidgin English demanding surrender. Finally there was silence for a second before the captain of the Seventy Seventh came back. “*It’s empty here, captain. But we’ve found a trap door; it leads down into a tunnel. Should we follow it?*”

The commander of operations narrowed his hood in wicked glee. “No, *leave a two man detail to guard that end of the tunnel and get both divisions to my position immediately. I have a feeling we’re about to get lucky.*”

The captain replied with grim pleasure laced in his voice. “*We’ll be there before they are, sir.*”

It was only two minutes before the Seventy Seventh and Eighth Infantries were in position. Esdras redeployed his forces to form a semicircle around the Whomping Willow, intent on driving Sirius Black to the shores of the lake, leaving him with no chance of escape. It wasn’t long before the first of many shadowy forms emerged from the base of the usually violent tree.

Esdras calmly addressed his command. “*Steady, men, we’ll take him down when the time is right.*”

But then, the clouds broke above them and all hell broke loose.

Captain Redoubt of the Ninety First Infantry made the call. “*Sir, one of those mortals is looking a little strange right now.*” He paused for a second. “*Werewolf, we have a werewolf. Orders, sir?*”

Esdras shrugged. “*Ignore it. We’re here for Black.*”

Redoubt growled and again called over their connection. “*Sir, we just lost one of the mortals. One second he was there and then he wasn’t.*” It was another second before he spoke again. “*I just lost another one, and that werewolf is coming your way.*”

In a split second Esdras had taken human form, his glowing green eyes scanning the moon illuminated world that looked so much like his normal vision. He watched from a high hover as the werewolf

passed by. In the darkness, another form ran up, took one look at the low hovering form of the nearby Malachi DeCay, then whimpered and backed away. All Esdras could see was a dog. *"I don't see anything, just a dog."* And then it clicked. *"A dog that is afraid of Dementors..."*

He continued to watch the black dog and watched it back away in terror. Aaron came over the hood. *"Esdras, talk to me."*

Captain Demnin took Dementor form again and called through the hoods. *"All personnel, go to ground level hover and stay close as you move in, the prisoner is an animagus."* He called out in his mortal voice. "Sirius Black, this is Captain Esdras Demnin of the Azkaban Guard. Surrender yourself and we will allow you time to prepare for death."

The Dementors advanced, watching in satisfaction as the black canine form before them dissolved into the silvery glow of a mortal. As the four divisions continued to box the mortal in, he was joined by two other glowing mortals. Esdras shifted forms and cursed as he saw Harry and Hermione in the field of action, but refused to let them interfere. Retaking Dementor form he called out again. *"All personnel, there are two non-targets in the field of action. Arresting officers will proceed with incapacitation attacks only."*

Over one hundred voices replied in the affirmative and the wall of black continued to float march towards the three terrified figures. It was Lieutenant Sectus himself that made the approach. By now all two of the three mortal forms were down, but one was still putting up token resistance in the form of a laughable Patronus. Sectus lowered his hood and moved in to subdue the final mortal when hell again broke loose.

Captain Maul called out over the hoods. *"Patronus incoming!"* There was a pause, and his voice took on a fearful tone. *"It's registering at over one thousand soul equivalents."*

Esdras cursed hard. *"Hold your ground! Do not retreat until you have no other choice! We are not leaving here without Black!"*

Captain Demnin held on to the nearest tree and tried to keep sight of the mortals as the blinding light of the Patronus bucked through his

troops, scattering them like mint seeds in the winter wind. He could feel his supersolenoid bloating at the excess energy he was being exposed to, too much more of this and he wouldn't have troops to command. He growled low and spoke the hated order. "*All personnel, retreat. Retreat to the forest immediately.*"

Chapter 23 – Temporal Causality

Aaron Reaping cursed and wrapped a strip of his cloak around his arm. He had a deep puncture wound that was still bleeding around the edges but healing quickly. He looked up at Esdras, who was leaning against a tree. *"It was a damned stag, Esdras. It came out of nowhere. I can count on one hand the number of people who can cast a Patronus with that much power behind them and still have four fingers left."*

Esdras nodded slowly. *"And we know it wasn't Headmaster Dumbledore."* He sighed. *"Power like that in the wrong hands could destroy us all."*

The communication charm in his hood came to life, and Captain Redoubt's angry voice came through. *"Esdras, you're not going to believe this. I'm at the front gate right now, and Minister Fudge is here. He says that Severus Snape managed to apprehend Black single handedly. I let him pass and he's on his way to the castle as we speak."*

Esdras punched the tree, leaving a hole in the bark. He turned to face the equally incredulous Aaron. *"You've got to be kidding me. I don't believe this. He's trying to steal our capture."* He then touched his hood and called out. *"Micah, hold your position, I'm going to go try to work this out."* He looked to Aaron again. *"Reaping, you're with me."*

The two Dementors floated in the air towards the castle, changing out of their assault cloaks midflight. They could see glowing form of the minister as he walked up the stairs and in the front door. They rushed along behind him and caught up with him just before he came to the Hospital Wing. Esdras was on his right flank and spoke quickly. *"Minister, good evening."*

The minister turned quickly and looked at the towering form. *"Oh, Captain, it's good to see you. I take it you heard the good news. Professor Snape will certainly receive the Order of Merlin for this."*

The trio passed through the doors into the Hospital Wing and Esdras roared to the black clad form standing beside Dumbledore. *"Snape, you rat bastard! You stole our capture!"*

The potions master jolted at being addressed so harshly, but quickly recovered and scoffed at the rapidly advancing Dementor. "Please, Captain. If you could do your job properly, you wouldn't have need for me. You're just lucky that I was able to subdue Black before harm came..."

The words left Snape as Esdras gripped him by the head and lifted him upward. He squeezed, slowly applying more and more pressure. "You know as well as I do that you don't have what it takes to bring down a capture like Sirius Black, and there's no way you could have managed to keep those three out of trouble." With his other hand, Esdras indicated the bed bound forms of Harry, Hermione, and Ron. "You're attempting to steal a capture from a Dementor. This is a very, very bad idea."

Dumbledore calmly stepped in and placed a hand on the Dementors arm, abating his anger and causing him to lower the professor. Minister Fudge stammered for a second at the sight of the Dementor's rage and then cleared his throat. "Captain Demnin, I believe there will be time to deal with this later. Sirius Black is locked up in the tower and waiting for you."

The Dementor billowed out his cloak and growled, his hood never leaving Snape. "Madame Pomfrey, when these three wake up, make sure they get chocolate. They'll most likely be experiencing exposure to my kind, a fact which Professor Snape surely left out." He turned and floated over to an open window. "Let's do this, Aaron."

The tower stood high above the castle. In a single, solitary room, Sirius Black sat quietly waiting his fate. Or at least he should have been. Presently, he was being freed by the hands of his godson and his friend. The three were joined by the hippogriff Buckbeak, another wrongfully accused soul saved earlier that same day.

The three mortals had their backs turned to face the hippogriff as the two Dementors floated calmly up the tower, resting on the ramparts. Both Esdras and Aaron drew their wands and brought them to bear at the prisoner. Esdras called out quickly. "Sirius Black, put your hands up and step away from the hippogriff."

The three mortals spun around quickly, Harry and Hermione both with their wands out. Harry began to call forth a Patronus but the Dementors stopped him, both casting Expelliarmus charms and catching the wands before advancing slowly. Yet still the pair stood protectively in front of Black, who was cowering from the towering forms. Harry had a particular fire in his eyes. "Esdras, he didn't do it. He didn't kill anyone."

The Dementor captain sighed and handed back Harry's wand as the commander did the same to Hermione. "Of course he didn't, and I'm glad you finally realize that. Now what are you two doing here? I saw you not a minute ago laying unconscious in the Hospital Wing."

Hermione was able to overcome her shock long enough to explain. "I have a Time-Turner; we've been up for hours. And what do you mean of course he didn't? You've been trying to capture him all year."

Esdras waved aside her concern. "A ploy in order to keep an eye on him and make sure he didn't do anything too stupid. If I had wanted to, I could have arrested or killed him at any time."

Harry glared at the towering Dementors. "If you knew he was innocent, why didn't you say anything?"

The Dementor sighed and took human form, looking at Harry with glowing green eyes. "You need to hear the whole story. Now listen quickly, all of you. Near the end of the last war, Voldemort was actively trying to recruit the Azkaban Guard and Dementors in general. If Dementors ever revolted against the Treaty of Edinburgh, I would take my place as king and have control over Azkaban. He contacted me directly using a man by the name of Peter Pettigrew. After Voldemort's death, Pettigrew was stupid enough to again contact me, after his supposed murder at the hands of Sirius Black."

Sirius huffed slightly. "That boy never was the brightest."

Esdras nodded. "Indeed. After that, I knew that chi psi three ninety was innocent. Sirius, you came under the protection of my infantry division, that's why you were able to survive for thirteen years. No one survives Azkaban for that long without the protection of a guard division. Then when you escaped, we had to come after you. I was

lucky enough to be able to get my entire division here, at least after that Quidditch incident.”

Harry was still angry. “But if you knew he was innocent, why didn’t you do anything to get him out of Azkaban?”

Esdras shook his head. “You don’t get it, Harry. The Ministry doesn’t listen to Dementors on most matters; we’re seen as a means to an end. And besides, if we had helped Sirius escape, where would that have gotten him? Not even we knew where Pettigrew had holed up. He would have been an escaped prisoner on the run with very little hope, just like he is now.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, Dumbledore heard his story and believes him. Pettigrew was Ron’s pet rat, that’s where he was hiding all these years.”

Aaron nudged Esdras. “That would explain why Redoubt lost track of two mortals. The dog was Black and the other one was Pettigrew.”

Esdras nodded. “And why Sirius was so intent on getting into Hogwarts.” He turned his attention to Sirius. “Still, we have no way to trace Pettigrew and you’ll be on your own. I don’t know what you’re planning to do, but it had better be good.”

Sirius shrugged and patted Buckbeak. “I’ve got a ride and I have some places that not even Dementors know about. I’ll hole up until the heat is off me, then we’ll see where things lead.”

The Dementor nodded and sighed. “I will have my men distract the others so you may make an escape. I wish you the best of luck, Mister Black.” Esdras extended his hand. The ex-prisoner hesitated for a second, then took it and shook it firmly. Esdras smiled and pulled out his assault cloak, accessing the communication charm in the hood. He spoke English, a language that only his infantry division knew. “Malachi, we are at code white. I need a clear path from the castle immediately.”

It took a few seconds before the lieutenant commander replied. “Understood, sir, code white confirmed. Your path is plotted and manned, look for the lights in the sky. DeCay out.”

The captain turned and scanned the horizon as Sirius and Harry said goodbye. After a moment, he stepped into their circle and spoke quickly. "You'll have to head out towards Hogsmeade. Look for the blue lights, those will be my men marking the path for you. I wish you luck, Mister Black, and I hope that we meet again under better circumstances."

Hopping onto the back of Buckbeak, Sirius Black flashed a smile. "Captain Demnin was it?" Esdras nodded. "Call me Sirius. And the feeling is mutual."

The four watched as the ex-convict escaped into the night, heading towards a string of pale blue lights stretching towards the horizon. Esdras sighed and put his hands to his face. "I'm going to lose my command over this. I'll be lucky if they don't bust me straight back to cadet."

Aaron put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Don't worry; I'll make sure you stay in my division."

Esdras glared. "Not helping."

Hermione looked to her watch and gasped. "Harry, we have to hurry, we need to be back in the Hospital Wing before Dumbledore locks the door."

The Dementors looked at them in confusion. "Why is he going to lock the door?"

Hermione smiled as she pulled Harry along with her. "To make sure that we can't get out and do this."

Aaron scratched his hood and looked at Esdras. "*Did that make any sense to you?*"

Esdras shook his head. "*Time travel, it's a cornucopia of disturbing concepts.*" He sighed again and took Dementor form. "*Come on, act angry. Sirius Black just escaped.*"

Two mortals and two Dementors trailed a third mortal moving at very high speed towards the Hospital Wing. Severus Snape, in the lead of the pack, burst through the heavy door and began shouting at the surprisingly innocent looking Harry Potter. "You! I don't know how you did it, but you helped him escape!"

Harry backed rapidly away from the red faced professor as Dumbledore attempted to calm him down. "Now Severus, you know that that is impossible. I locked the door to the Hospital Ward as I left. There's no way that Harry could have gotten out."

The potions master continued to stew, and turned his attention to the Dementors in the room. He advanced upon the captain. "Then it was you. It had to have been!"

Esdras scoffed, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Oh yes, professor. It was the one person who wanted to capture Sirius Black more than anyone else, the one who has been here all year with the express purpose of catching him. The one whose job depended on it. I just stood there and watched him slip away." He advanced on the professor, turning the momentum of the argument against him and backing him against a wall. "Do you know what I'll lose as a result of not nailing this capture? I could have had him Kissed and subdued, but no, you had to move in and attempt to do a job you're unqualified for. This is your fault and I'll make sure you take the blame."

Dumbledore again stepped in to protect the potions master. "Captain Demnin, I believe you would do well to report the current situation to your commanders at Azkaban. We can discuss blame and fault at a later date."

The captain stiffened and glared once more at Snape before turning. "Understood, headmaster." He pointed to Aaron, who was lazily floating in the corner. "Reaping, let's go."

As they cleared the Hospital Wing, Aaron looked back and chuckled softly. "That went well, they don't suspect a thing."

Esdras nodded happily. "I'm pleased. What's one career compared to a life? We can contact Admiral Grim in a few minutes. I want to talk to Katie first."

Aaron's hood widened. "Esdras, if you get demoted for this..."

The captain nodded. "I know. It'll probably be decades before I can leave the island again."

They floated in silence up the stairwell and floated along the passage until they came to the Fat Lady. Esdras presented his badge to her, and she smiled politely before opening the portrait hole for him. Leaving Aaron outside, Esdras floated in and was promptly tackled by a fast moving Gryffindor. Katie smiled at him. "You're okay!"

Esdras nodded. "I'm okay now."

She was quick to pick up on his attitude, and it worried her. "What's wrong? Don't tell me you didn't catch him."

He shook his head. "It's a long story, Katie, and I promise I'll tell you about it soon. But right now you need to know that we didn't get him. Guard Command isn't going to be happy about this, and I will probably be demoted. I may not get to see you again after all this is over."

The look in her eyes broke his heart. "Don't say that, Esdras. We'll find a way. You've got your holiday leave, and I've got school holidays. I'm sure something will work out. And you're not even sure that they'll demote you." She smiled bravely. "We'll find a way."

The Dementor closed his eyes and pulled her close, hugging her tightly as she returned the pressure of his grip. The words came naturally. "I love you, Katie."

She relaxed in his arms, her body molding against his own. "I love you, too, Esdras."

Time seemed to stand still for the few moments that they stayed like that. Finally, Esdras pulled away. "I have to contact Azkaban and tell them what has happened. I want you to get some sleep and I'll see you tomorrow for breakfast, okay?"

She nodded and smiled softly, wiping a few stray tears from her cheeks. "I'll be there."

The Dementor rose and floated towards the portrait hole. He paused before the portal for a second and then looked back. With a gentle smile, he was off into the night.

Chapter 24 – Unexpected Fates, Simple Pleasures

Esdras Demnin was nervous. His conversation with Azkaban did not go well. Admiral Grim was flying in, and scheduled to arrive at Hogwarts before dinner. The admiral had told him that Azkaban would be in contact with the Ministry and that his fate would be discussed in depth. Sufficed to say, Esdras was not looking forward to it. The Dementor sat at the Ravenclaw table, quickly wolfing down his breakfast. He had run into Katie before entering the Great Hall and told her that he would meet her after breakfast outside to tell her everything that she needed to know.

After a few servings of eggs, Esdras floated up from the table, made his excuses to his housemates, and floated towards the door. There he met Katie, who was looking equally curious and nervous. Despite that, she still managed a stunning smile for him. “You said you wanted to tell me something important?”

Esdras nodded and took her hand, leading her out the door for a walk around the castle. “What I’m about to tell you is a secret that very few people know. It will run contrary to everything that you’ve been told for most of your life and all of this year, so listen first, and then ask questions.” Katie smiled and nodded, so Esdras decided to go for broke. “Sirius Black was wrongly accused. He is guilty of no crime.”

Katie blinked in confusion, but kept walking. “Are you serious?”

He nodded. “Very much so, I know for a fact that the one person he was supposed to have murdered is still alive and therefore must be responsible for the collateral damage, as well.”

She looked at him curiously. “And those times when he broke in and you got angry? And that whole week where you went all Azkaban Guard on us when he got into the dormitory?”

Esdras smirked slightly. “An act, necessary to convince everyone that I was intent on capturing him. You have no idea how hard it was for me to act that way towards everyone, you especially. I’m so very sorry.”

Katie smiled. "You're already forgiven, darling." She sighed and shook her head slowly. "But why didn't you tell anyone." As Esdras told the story of the carefully hidden history, Katie's confusion turned to understanding. Finally, she looked at him with awe. "So in order to help him now, you had to surrender your career. That's a very brave thing, Esdras."

The Dementor looked confused. "You're not angry with me? I'm going to have to give up everything I have here, everything we have."

Katie smiled and hugged him tightly. "You protected the innocent and did what was right. You are a good Dementor and an honorable guard, and I am proud of you."

In the bright sunshine and light wind of the morning, Esdras was content to stay with his arms around Katie. Guard Command, admirals, prisoners, law, and justice be damned.

News came that Admiral Grim had arrived just before dinner. The guards at the main gate had reported to Aaron, and Aaron had faithfully reported to Esdras that the admiral was accompanied by the commander of the mortal auror guards and Cornelius Fudge. The presence of three high ranking figures did nothing to alleviate the Dementor's nerves.

Neither did the fact that, at dinner, there were three extra places set at the High Table, one for the minister, one for the auror commander, and one for the admiral. Esdras found that his ravenous appetite had left him. The other Ravenclaws were well aware of the situation that their friend was in and Cho spoke quietly to him from across the table. "It'll be alright, Esdras. We're all here for you."

The Dementor shook his head. "It won't matter; you'll be unable to stop this from coming. This is Azkaban business. I have no idea why they'd want to take care of it in front of the entire school. Unless they actively want to humiliate me for my failure, but that sort of thing goes against our very nature."

Katie, who was equally nervous, by this time had slipped from the Gryffindor table. She popped up beside Cho and squeezed in next to

her. "Esdras, Aaron told me all about it. What is Admiral Grim doing here?"

Before he could answer, the attention of the school was drawn to the sound of metal on glass. Dumbledore was calling the school's attention by tapping his knife to his goblet. He rose slowly and scanned the crowd before speaking. "As many of you know, Sirius Black was recently captured and just as recently escaped. For the capture, we have to thank our own Professor Snape and Captain Demnin. As for the escape, we can only attribute it to the tenacity of Sirius Black." He smiled brightly, considering the circumstances. "Regarding this, Admiral Judas Grim of the Azkaban Guard Command has a presentation to make."

The admiral rose quietly and floated over the table to stand on the dais in front of the table. He called out in a voice that needed no translation. "*Captain Esdras Demnin, report.*"

Esdras looked to his friends and smiled the smile of one resigned to his fate, calm and serene. He rose and quietly slipped out of his mortal form before floating down the aisle to stand below the dais in front of his commander. He snapped to attention and saluted. "*Captain Demnin reports, sir.*"

The Dementor admiral drew a parchment scroll from the sleeve of his cloak and unrolled it. He spoke slowly, and behind him Dumbledore translated the Azkabaaner into English. "*Due to the continued threat of the escaped inmate chi psi three nine zero, Sirius Black, the Azkaban Guard Command has deemed that a special force must be assembled with the mission of capturing him. It has been decided that observing the Hogsmeade area during the Hogwarts school year will facilitate his capture. With the cooperation and confirmation of the Ministry of Magic, the Azkaban Guard Command hereby commissions the Fourth Fleet, with the mission of guarding the Hogsmeade region and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The Fourth Fleet will work in cooperation with the mortal auror forces to respond to any report of Sirius Black, time or place regardless.*" The admiral pulled out a second scroll and opened it up. "*Mortal Katie Bell, come forward.*"

Still at the Ravenclaw table, Katie startled, not expecting to hear her name. She rose and walked quickly up the aisle to stand beside Esdras, who was still locked at attention. She spoke with Azkabaaner much improved after months of practice. *"The admiral wishes to see me?"*

Admiral Grim nodded. *"So it is true, a second mortal fluent in our language."* He looked over his shoulder. *"You have company, Headmaster Dumbledore."* He turned to Katie and held out the second scroll. *"Rumor travels far, even all the way to Azkaban. I believe Esdras would like it if you were the one to read this."*

Katie nodded and ascended the dais to take the scroll, casting her eyes across the delicate Azkabaaner script. She caught sight of one word and gasped. With a smile on her face, she began to read in a loud voice. *"Captain Esdras Tarsus of the royal house of Demnin, you are hereby requested and required to take command of the Fourth Fleet of the Azkaban Guard, with all the commensurate duties and responsibilities thereof. To this end, you are hereby given the promotion to the rank of Rear Admiral, effective with the reading of this scroll. Signed this thirty sixth day of Recaldes, Treaty Year 1022."*

Esdras was in shock, and didn't break from attention, not even as Admiral Grim came down from the dais to tap him gently on the shoulders with his wand, transforming the silver vultures on his shoulders to single silver crescent moons, denoting him as part of the Admiralty. He was still in shock as they saluted and the admiral floated away. He was still in shock when Dumbledore smiled down at him and spoke kindly. "I trust that you'll find time in your busy schedule to attend classes, Admiral? I believe the Ravenclaw Quidditch team would be disappointed if you resigned."

All Esdras could do was nod his reply to the wizard. But then Katie stepped down from the dais and smiled at him. "Congratulations, Admiral Demnin."

The newly promoted admiral shook his head quickly. "Did that just happen, Katie?"

She nodded and stepped closer. Esdras took mortal form and she jumped into his arms. "I am proud of you." She kissed him softly, but it quickly deepened. When they broke, she smiled. "So very proud."

It started slowly, centered around the Ravenclaw table. First one, then six, then many, many more. It moved across tables like a wave. Hogwarts applauded their own Dementor admiral.

The Hogwarts Express trundled along southward, again heading for King's Cross Station. Inside one car, a multi-house band of students gathered together. Katie Bell, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Esdras Demnin all sat together taking turns reading the note that Sirius Black had just sent via owl. Esdras had his cloak off and was absently adjusting the silver crescent moons for the hundredth time. Katie pulled the cloak away from him. "Keep touching them and they'll tarnish."

The Dementor laughed. "They have anti-tarnishing charms, you know. I think they'll be fine." He took his cloak back and turned to Harry. "Well, looks like I don't have to worry about keeping you out of Hogsmeade anymore."

Harry laughed and held up the second parchment sheet, a signed permission form from his godfather. "I guess not." He laughed. "I can't help but feel like we got away with something very big here."

Esdras nodded. "We did. We conned the Ministry, Azkaban, and pretty much the whole wizarding world and came out on top. Don't get cocky." He laughed suddenly. "I still can't believe that was your Patronus. You should have seen what that thing did to Veras Maul."

Katie, comfortably resting against his shoulder, smirked quietly and gave her boyfriend a confused look as she brought up something that had been bothering her since the start of the train ride. "Esdras, I'm not complaining, but why are you riding the train back, anyway? You just got promoted to a fleet command. Shouldn't you be with your troops?"

He shrugged happily and leaned back in the seat. "It's tradition. Hogwarts students ride the train in, and ride the train out. I'm not one

to break with tradition. Besides, Captain Reaping is more than capable of seeing the fleet home to Azkaban.”

This brought a smile to her face. “So you did it, you gave Aaron command of the Thirteenth Infantry?”

Esdras nodded. “I didn’t even have a second choice. I couldn’t imagine anyone else taking command, and it’ll be good for him.”

They were interrupted by the door to their compartment opening. Cho stuck her head in and smiled. “Good afternoon, Admiral.”

The new admiral smiled happily. “Hello, Cho. And please stop calling me that. You’re my friend and you aren’t under my command.”

She laughed gently. “We’re nearing the station and I just wanted to say that if you can pull yourself away from Azkaban and are in the neighborhood, you’re always welcome to come visit me.” She looked to Katie. “Not that I’m trying to steal him away from you or anything.”

Katie brushed her concerns aside and smiled at her Dementor. “Esdras is allowed to have friends.”

Cho smiled happily. “Good. Send me a letter sometime, then.” She waved. “I’ll see you, Esdras.” She looked to the other side of the compartment and smiled slightly. “Harry.”

Esdras and Katie actively tried to hide their smirks of amusement at his flushed face.

It wasn’t much longer before the Hogwarts Express pulled into King’s Cross. Exiting the train, Esdras stretched and tugged his trunk along behind him. Katie followed him and placed her trunk down next to his, scanning the platform for her parents. “Well, it’s been a good year, wouldn’t you say?”

The Dementor shrugged. “More or less. I got a promotion, a girlfriend, and good grades. Not much more a man can ask for.”

Katie laughed and waved to her parents, who had just walked through the wall to the platform. “I keep forgetting that you are a creature of simple pleasures.”

Esdras smiled and put an arm around her, waving to the Bells as well. “Simple pleasures, I like that.”

THE END of RISE OF THE GUARDIAN

But don't worry, Esdras Demnin will be back in...

TRIAL OF THE GUARDIAN

The second book in the “Guardian of Azkaban” series.